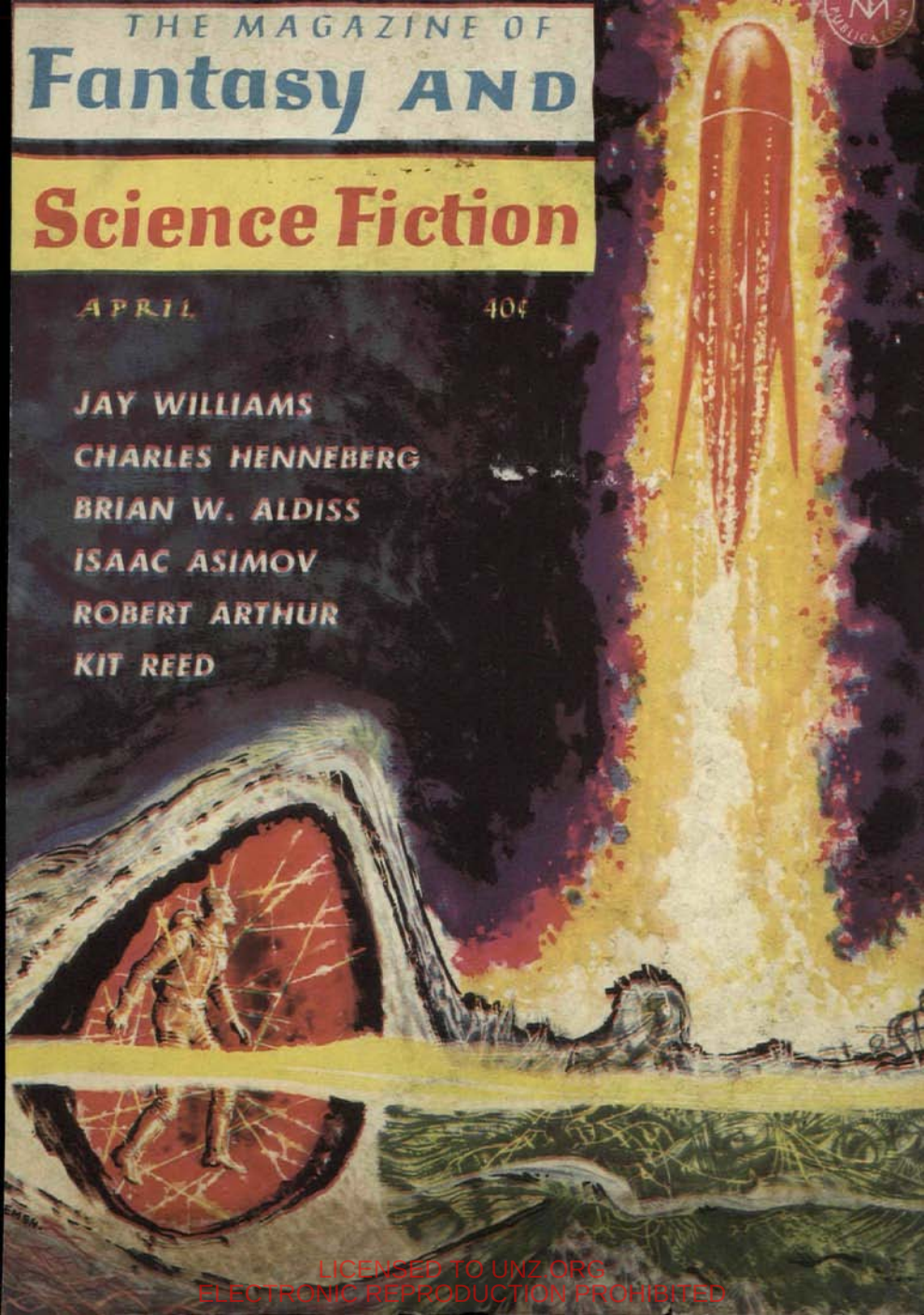
THE MAGAZINE OF

Fantasy AND Science Fiction

APRIL 40¢

JAY WILLIAMS
CHARLES HENNEBERG
BRIAN W. ALDISS
ISAAC ASIMOV
ROBERT ARTHUR
KIT REED



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Fantasy and Science Fiction

APRIL — *Including Venture Science Fiction*

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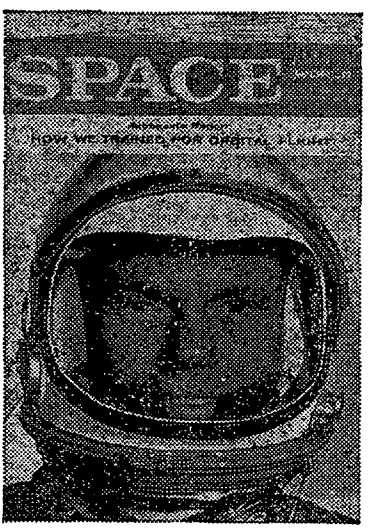

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EDITORIAL

In 1950, when this magazine was still a quarterly, we picked up a copy of it at a newsstand in the Times Square subway station, over towards the BMT. Possibly we were going to see a girl who lived in Brooklyn; in those days all the girls seemed to live in Brooklyn. We had just come back from abroad and were shortly to go abroad again, and consequently missed many of the earlier issues: but no matter: we were hooked. In that same year we made our first submission to this magazine; it was returned with what Ward Moore (at whose suggestion we sent it) called "the gentlest letter of rejection he had ever seen." Anthony Boucher, then (with J. Francis McComas) co-editor, had a way of turning down a story which was more encouraging to authors than some editors' ways of accepting. To list the names of the very fine writers who have appeared here, many in professional print for the first time, would tax the capacity of this page. Boucher and McComas (and, later, Robert P. Mills) also had a way with them which resulted in the magazine's being more than a collection of stories published at regular intervals. It has been from its inception a periodical with a personality; not only read, but loved. As the fourth (and new) editor of the magazine, we hope to keep it so. Few fields of fiction—indeed, perhaps none—possess the degree of attachment and involvement which that of science fiction and fantasy has seen evolved among its readers; an interaction which continues to affect to this day both the literature and those who love it. As man's knowledge of microcosm and macrocosm continues to expand and yet to focus with ever-increasing intensity, stories based on this expansion and focus —and frequently predicting it in detail and direction—will continue to flourish. The Magazine of Fantasy and Science Fiction intends to continue to offer you, as far as lies within our power, the best of these. We hope it will continue to receive, and to merit, your patronage, your respect, and your affection.

Avram Davidson

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In this issue . . .

. . . the name of The Kindly Editor (there is only one) appears in a different position, and under a different title, on the mast-head this month. Robert P. Mills will henceforth be giving most of his time to his new duties as head of the literary department in the New York office of General Artists Corporation. Under him (as under Anthony Boucher and J. Francis McComas), The Magazine of Fantasy and Science Fiction has been, if not precisely Onlie Begetter, at least Nursing Mother, of a host of new writers. All the stories in this issue were selected from the treasury handed on to us by Bob Mills, and among them are stories by three people whose names are new to these pages: Hugo Correa, Joseph Dickinson, and Sylvia Edwards. The gentlemen write on space travel: one of close tomorrow, the other of a millennium yet to come; the lady leads us into the complex questions of substance, essence, and identity. John Shepley appears again after an absence whose length, we trust, will create no precedent; and the veteran craftsmen (listed alphabetically, so as to avoid any Parnassian hair-pullings) who contribute their precious bales to this particular argosy carry the well-known names of Aldiss, Arthur, Asimov, Bester, Henneberg, Reed, Thomas, and Williams. The reader, for whose sole benefit all these people have toiled, has now only to select a good light, lean back, and . . . well . . . *read.*

Coming next month . . .

. . . is James Blish's *Who's In Charge Here?,* originally scheduled for March, in which the Magus of Milford (Pa.) opens on Mott Street (N.Y.C.) and a caldron of dragon's eggs; and takes us around that City on a curious circuit of darkness visible. Vance Aandahl, whose talents, burning bright and brighter, may astonish the Sixties as Ray Bradbury's did the Forties, is back with another story. And William F. Nolan, whom we have seen here once before in collaboration, now returns with a lovely bit of lunacy, *One Of Those Days,* all of his own.

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Since a certain day on the dunes of North Carolina many long years ago no one has written a story about the first man to fly. The last story of the first man in space—for so long so rich a subject—was written only yesterday. Equally intriguing as a theme has been the arrival on Earth of the first extra-terrestrials, and the question of Galactic Union. The last of these stories (as of this writing, anyway) has not yet been set down in print. There is always something new which can be said about even an old idea, and Jay Williams says it here—and, lest we should seem to be damning with faint praise (or even praising with faint damns), we hasten to say that he says it excellently well, and that it is well worth saying. And reading.

GIFTS OF THE GODS

by Jay Williams

THE GREAT GOLDEN SHIP HOVered over the Atlantic with lightning crackling about its fins. People stood on the rooftops of the city staring, pointing, shading their eyes, some with pearl-handled opera glasses, some with cheap telescopes, and a few inveterate bird- or window-watchers with expensive field glasses. The ship settled slowly into the bay and was lost in a cloud of steam.

The steam cleared. It could be seen that the ship floated, and all about it were hundreds of silvery specks: dead fish bobbing on the dirty water. A dark square appeared in the golden metal and there was a long, simultaneous "ooh" from the city, like the cry that goes up with a skyrocket. A small craft, curiously-shaped and high-sided, launched from the ship and soundlessly shot towards the Battery throwing up a high fan of white water like a wing.

The five people who stepped ashore looked like people. Their

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skins were a firm coppery brown, all save one whose color was creamy yellow; aside from this there seemed to be no discernible differences among them. They wore snug, jointed costumes, something like a light armor but of the color of a beetle's carapace, and about their faces were pale blue aureoles barely to be seen in the daylight. They stood calmly looking at the city, at the crowds, and exchanging a few soft words among themselves. One of them bent over, picked up the boat, rapidly folded it into a small packet and thrust it in a pouch that hung at his belt.

Seventeen people died in those few minutes, some being pushed off the crowded rooftops, some trampled in the streets, four or five of heart failure, suffocation, or sheer astonishment. The babblement made the buildings tremble. Slowly, the men from the ship walked up into South Street.

At this point a shrilling of sirens heralded police cars and several large, black limousines. There had been hasty debates over protocol: whether the visitors should be received by the Mayor of New York, or by a representative of the United States government, or by the Secretary-General of the United Nations. In the end all three had come. The Mayor, rowing himself forward with his elbows, held his hat over his chest and tried to bow. The crowd, oblivious of the police, pressed closer to get a good look at the visitors.

The American delegate to the United Nations, who had come as the embodiment of the United States government, held out his hand with a rather fixed smile. "Allow me to welcome you in the name of—" he began.

The Mayor interrupted. "Gentlemen, it gives this great city great pleasure to extend our hand of friendship—" and then stopped, lost in his own syntax.

One of the visitors stepped a little way ahead of his fellows. In a clear, ringing voice, he said, in perfect English, "We thank you for your sentiments and your welcome. It is our desire to go to your—er—Center." He paused, and conferred for an instant with one of the others. "The United Nations Center," he said. "That is where all the governments and peoples of your planet are represented, are they not?"

The Secretary-General, biting down a smile of innocent triumph, said, "It will give me great pleasure to conduct you there. Will you step into my car, please?"

The five visitors nodded. Their leader said, "I will do so. My companions prefer to—um—I do not know how to translate it . . . They will follow us in their own way."

At this, one of them produced

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the packet into which he had folded their boat. He quickly unfolded it, set it on the pavement, and got into it. The three others joined him. A delicate pink glow appeared and the boat rose to the level of the second-floor windows. One of the Visitors looked over the side with a smile, waved his hand, and called something to the leader.

The leader nodded, and said to the Secretary-General, "We are ready. Shall we go?"

The Secretary-General, a trifle dazed, pulled himself together and bowed the Visitor into the open limousine. As they drove off slowly, with the crowd opening before them, he said, "If you'll pardon the question—why didn't you just float to shore, instead of sailing in?"

The Visitor looked curiously at him. His eyes, it could be seen, had no whites but were round and opaline. "When there is water, why should we not sail," he said.

Then he added, "Floating. Is that what you call floating? I had thought that to float meant to rest on the surface of some material, or to glide along with it. But you see, they are—hm—propelling themselves, while nullifying the attraction of gravity." Then, half-turning in the seat and bending the fixed gaze of his large, iridescent eyes upon the S-G, he said, "Do you mean to say that if you had been in our place, you would have preferred to fly over that lovely water?"

The S-G, utterly confused, was silent.

As they neared Fourteenth Street, the S-G said, "We appreciate your visit. This is a great day for Earth."

"Is it?" said the Visitor politely.

"Well, it's not every day that we have arrivals from another planet," said the S-G with an artificial chuckle, glancing involuntarily back at the Mayor, who sat in his own car, red-faced and annoyed.

"Oh. Yes. I see."

"Yes, another planet . . . Where *do* you come from, by the way?"

"We call it Earth," said the Visitor. "It is quite a long way off. Many parsecs, you would say. It is one of a great many Earths. We are a—well, a United Nations, but of planets." He uttered a quivering, high-pitched sound which the S-G took to be the equivalent of a laugh.

"Yes, this is all very familiar to us," said the S-G. "A Federation of Planets, advanced technology, and so forth. Our science fiction writers have been preparing us for it for years. And now, it is a reality. You have come, I presume, to offer us membership in your Federation?"

The visitor blinked. It was a

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slow blink, and it came from below the eye rather than above it, a deliberate, unhurried sliding of a kind of nictating membrane. It conveyed wonderment and polite surprise.

"Oh, dear, no," he replied. "Membership? Not at all. Furnishing one's own transportation is one of the first requirements. Your people cannot yet lift an interplanetary vessel, to say nothing of an intergalactic one."

Just then, they arrived at the United Nations building, and the conversation was cut short by the mob of delegates, officials, stenographers, guides, guards, and tourists, who encircled them in one violent hypercenotic outpouring. With some difficulty a space was cleared. The Visitors in the air descended and packed up their vehicle. The S-G led them all into the main building and thence to the General Assembly hall, which was speedily packed with delegates and other gapers. Newsreel and television cameras were focused on the historic moment, and reporters poised pencils over paper.

The S-G, smoothing back his feathery grey hair, said, "We, the assembled representatives of all the nations of Earth, greet you and welcome you, visitors and representatives of another planet."

The Visitors inclined their heads slightly, but said nothing. They had been seated on the dais behind the rostrum, where they could face the hall.

The United States delegate, tapping his fingertips together, said, "I would like to ask that the credentials of the Visitors be presented to this body. A pure formality, of course, but I think we should have some assurance that these gentlemen are—er—what they say they are."

Before the S-G could speak, the delegate from the Soviet Union shot to his feet, and cried, "I also have a question to ask of the —ah—captain, or leader of the Visitors."

That one rose and said, "You may address me as Spokesman, rather than leader. Our captain, as a matter of fact, is still in our vessel."

"Ah. Yes. Well, sir, how is it that you address us in English? I wish to ask this body what assurance we have that this is not simply a hoax on the part of certain Powers?"

Spokesman replied, in impeccable Russian, "I can, as a matter of fact, speak almost all the dialects of your planet. But I cannot address you simultaneously in Turkish, Greek, French, Japanese, Gaelic, Syrian, and so forth. I have chosen to speak English because I am assured by our researchers that it is understood by a majority of your members. It is not difficult to learn a human

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tongue, of course, provided one knows how. And we have had researchers on your planet for the past twenty years or so, collecting data, accumulating languages, and so on.

"As for our credentials . . ." He paused, surveying the audience solemnly. "Why do you want them?" he said. "We are not 'representatives' to your organization in the sense in which you have used the word. It is of no concern to us whether you believe that we are what we are, or not."

"I'm afraid I don't understand," said the British delegate, recovering first. "Does the gentleman imply that he was not sent by his government to contact us? If so, what does his presence here signify? I was given to understand that his first request was to be taken to the United Nations."

"That is correct," replied Spokesman. "When a planet is sufficiently advanced to have a central governing body, we prefer to act through it for the sake of convenience and efficiency."

The Secretary-General said, rather nervously, "Yes, but, I understood you to say—in the car, you know—that you were not going to offer us membership in your Federation. The question raised by the delegate from the United Kingdom is therefore germane."

"If," began the delegate from Bolivia, knitting his brows, "this is a declaration of war, let it be understood that we are ready—"

Spokesman raised a hand. "No, no," he said. "War? Certainly not. We do not have wars. I will explain.

"You see, sirs, our Federation, as you would call it, has certain laws. One of these is that when a planet reaches a condition we describe as—well, you would say, Federable—and thus meets certain requirements, its space ships are then contacted by members of our organization and it is offered equal membership.

"There are, however, other cases. We continually investigate other inhabited planets, and when we find that a section, or group, or nation can meet certain other requirements—let us call them, pre-Federable requirements—we are then charged to offer that group all the assistance necessary to enable them to come up to Federable level."

"I see," said the S-G. "Assistance. What form does this assistance take?"

"Chiefly, technological improvements," replied Spokesman. "Things the group cannot get or make for itself. In effect, we say, 'Tell us what you want and need and we will give it to you.' But you must understand, sirs, that our law requires us to make this offer, but that acceptance is voluntary."

"Yes, sir, we understand that

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perfectly," said the United States delegate, with a wide smile. "We understand, and we are proud and humble."

The French delegate put in, "May I ask Monsieur Spokesman to tell us what those requirements are he spoke of—the pre-Federable requirements?"

Spokesman held up a small, glittering object between the fingers of his right hand. From it, a metallic voice spoke:

"A group, or unit, of human beings, shall be said to be in a pre-Federable condition when they have successfully reached the following level of sophistication:

"They must have adapted successfully to their environment without drastically changing the ecology of the region so that it becomes unfit for other living beings.

"They must have developed creative arts which reflect their culture and are an integral part of their social organism, the performance of which arts does not rest on economic or political motivation.

"They must not take other life except for direct protection of their species, or the natural requirements of their own survival.

"They must have developed a social order in which no individual goes hungry or shelterless, and in which the physical well-being of one is the responsibility of all."

The voice ceased, and Spokesman put away his device.

The delegate from the United States broke the stillness. "Well, sir, everything you have said is embodied in the principles by which our great democracy, throughout its history, has attempted to . . ."

He fell silent before the grave, penetrating gaze of the Visitor.

Spokesman said, "We are not speaking of principles, but of practise. Our words are precise and admit of no loose interpretation."

"I protest!" said the delegate from the Soviet Union. "Civilized beings must admit of principle."

"We are not civilized," said Spokesman, placidly.

"But it is not a simple matter to put principles into practise when one is surrounded by hostility," cried the delegate from Pakistan.

"I did not say it was simple," Spokesman returned. "Principles are no more than good intentions. The hungry, the wounded, the dead, are not concerned with good intentions."

The French delegate, who had once visited the prisons in Algeria, cleared his throat several times. The British delegate, too proud to ask whether fox-hunting fell into the third category, shifted uncomfortably in his chair. The delegate from the United States, thinking of the increase

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in unemployment figures, tapped his teeth with a pencil. The Soviet delegate, considering state edicts on the nature of Art, buttoned and unbuttoned his jacket uneasily. No one spoke.

Then, at last, the Secretary-General said, "If you insist on literal and actual interpretations of your requirements, Mr. Spokesman, I'm afraid you won't find a single nation on earth which can fill your bill."

"Oh, but we have," said Spokesman, brusquely. "That is why we are here. In a place called the Kalahari Desert, in the continent of Africa, dwells a nation of small people whom you call Bushmen. They meet every requirement."

There was a moment of stunned quiet, and then a roar of protest. The S-G, banging furiously with his gavel, finally restored order.

The delegate from Ghana cried, "I protest! These—Bushmen—they are nothing but savages."

Spokesman smiled. He half turned and said something to his friends, several of whom made the odd noises that passed among them for laughter.

Then he said, "Savages? But this implies that they are inferiors, and only a little above brute beasts. As soon as men call other men by such names, they have failed in our third and fourth requirements."

The Canadian delegate, in a cold, nasal voice, said, "I confess I cannot understand how people with the high intellectual and technical attainments of our friends from outer space, can fail to take into account the matter of Progress." As he said it, the shining capital letter could be heard. "What have the Bushmen contributed to human history, or to the good of mankind? They have not progressed in five hundred years."

"I am afraid," said Spokesman, "that you confuse 'progress' with 'change'. It is true that you live in a social community which has changed profoundly in the past hundred years. But have you progressed? Are all our citizens happy, fully alive, intellectually mature?"

"I think I can safely say," put in the delegate from the United States, "that under our system of free enterprise, the vast majority of our people are secure. Yes, sir, I think they are satisfied and contented."

Spokesman's eyes flashed as he turned them on the speaker. "You used the word 'secure'. Do you think that security is essential to a mature being? Security is the least of his needs, for he knows that to be alive is to be insecure.

"As for your other words—do your contented citizens never kill themselves? Do they never take violent action against their em-

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ployers, or against the state? Are there not Indians in your land whose culture and property has been taken away from them, and who are now living in disease and poverty? Are there not hundreds of thousands of men whose skin color prevents them from earning a proper livelihood, or even from sitting alongside men of another color? Can you tell me that they are satisfied and contented?"

The pale blue halo which surrounded his face had become more pronounced and seemed to give off crisp sparks. One of his companions leaned forward and said something in an earnest tone. Spokesman stood silent for an instant or two while the color faded. Then he went on:

"You equate 'progress' with improved methods for chilling food, with better types of transportation, or with the discovery of cures for disease. Those things are not 'progress'. Progress is what you do with the cured people, and where you go with your improved transportation, and why you go there. Progress is what happens in your heart. Most of you are good people, but you have not progressed an inch in five hundred years, nor even a thousand. Given a chance for personal profit, there is not one of you who would not level the forests, destroy all wild life, kill a thousand other human beings, and turn your backs on the suffering of your fellows."

He seemed to sigh, and his head drooped. Before he could continue, a man in the back of the hall had broken through the police cordon and came running down the side aisle brandishing a pistol.

"Antichrist!" he screamed. "Return to the Devil, your master, ye powers of darkness!"

He was disarmed before he could fire, although there were mutterings of agreement in various parts of the hall.

Spokesman said, "Yes, I had forgotten your religion. I am told that a vast majority of you believe in lovingkindness, forgiveness, charity, and humility. Perhaps we had better not speak of that.

"In any case, we have spoken enough. I call on the representatives of the Bushmen to come forward."

There was a long, awkward pause. Then the S-G, blushing slightly, said, "I am afraid, Mr. Spokesman, that the Bushmen are not represented in this body."

"No? Why not?"

"Well—eh—our principle is that only nations ready for sovereignty may have their delegates seated here. When you come right down to it," he went on, stoutly, "it is very similar to your own laws governing your Federation."

"Similar?" said Spokesman, and again the slow translucent lid rose and fell before his eyes in amazement. "You may consider it simi-

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lar if you like. I presume that if you saw three big boys bullying a little boy you would consider that similar to the deliberations and decisions of adults."

"But there is also some doubt," said the S-G, "whether the Bushmen can actually be considered a nation."

Spokesman nodded. "I see. What you mean is that they are neither numerous enough, rich enough, nor strategically enough placed. In that case, will you please give the necessary orders to have representatives from their people sent here to meet with us. I know enough about your technology to ask that this be done within, say, forty-eight hours."

"Forty-eight hours?" The Secretary-General turned pale. "But my dear sir, it will take days simply to find the Bushmen."

"It's an outrage." The British delegate rose. "Speaking for Her Majesty's government, we can no longer lend our presence to this travesty—"

Many other delegates sprang to their feet. Spokesman glanced at his companions. The one with the creamy skin got up slowly and with a casual air pointed his finger at the assembly. There was a loud crackling noise and the air was filled with a pungent, yet rather pleasing odor. At once, all the radio and television instruments ceased functioning, the lights dimmed, and every single person in the hall and for a radius of fifty miles around it, was deprived of motion. All traffic froze as engines stopped and people were caught in absolute paralysis, and even airplanes were held motionless in the sky above the spot.

Spokesman said, with no trace of passion in his tone, "I regret that we must employ what appears to be coercion. However, we have learned that our standards do not always apply to primitive peoples. No one will be harmed. But I must warn you that if we are forced to the inconvenience of searching for the Bushmen ourselves, if we are denied the cooperation of this organization, we shall have to keep you all in a state of non-motion until we have concluded our business, simply in order to avoid being interfered with. It may prove to be more inconvenient for you than for us."

In the end, of course, they gave in. To tell the truth, many of the delegates were already contemplating methods of getting control of the Bushmen, while others were simply burning with curiosity to find out what the cosmic goodies would be that the fortunate aborigines were to receive.

As soon, therefore, as they were released from their spell and had agreed to help the Visitors, cabals began to form in various parts of the building.

The Soviet delegate, deep in discussion with Yugoslavia and

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Hungary, pointed out that it would be necessary to establish the principle of the right of small nations to self-government, and that this would require to be implemented by a strong arm, if necessary, to prevent the encroachment of colonial powers . . .

The American delegate, deep in discussion with Britain and Brazil, made it clear that it would be necessary to establish the principle of the right of small nations to self-government and that this would require to be implemented by a strong arm, if necessary, to prevent the encroachment of colonial powers . . .

The French delegate went about telling everyone that for his part he was only interested in seeing that the right of a small nation to govern itself should be protected, and that France always stood ready to uphold its historic role in preventing the exploitation of the weak and helpless by the powerful and sinister.

The Australian delegate was heard to murmur that a strong case might be made out for the ethnic connection between the Kalahari Bushmen and those of the Australian hinterland. The Egyptian delegate remarked that it was a well known fact that the Bushmen of the Kalahari had originally entered Bechuanaland from the Nile Basin. The Israeli delegate, chuckling, replied that if this were so it ought to be remembered that the whereabouts of several of the Lost Tribes had never been satisfactorily established.

Meanwhile, the Visitors relented in their 48-hour ultimatum, extending the time to one week, and an immense team of researchers set out in hundreds of jet planes supplied by every airline. They were delivered in a matter of hours, along with all their equipment, to Bulawayo, Serowe, and Windhoek, from which clouds of jeeps and trucks were swiftly launched. The world followed with bated breath the news from mobile television and radio stations, as a gigantic net was drawn about two-thirds of the Kalahari Desert, within which the puzzled, frightened, and mild little people were scooped. Eventually, over a thousand Bushmen were cornered at Lake Ngami and the Okavango Swamp. With the help of relays of interpreters they were made to understand that they would not be harmed, but that they must choose representatives to go before the men of another world, who would make them rich gifts.

It took nearly eight hours of steady talking for the Bushmen to realize what was wanted. Once they did, however, they gathered, giggling and whispering, into clans and villages, and then pushed forward their best men—expert hunters, fine singers and

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musicians, wise old leaders, and gallant young dancers.

These men, drawing together in a crowd and looking shyly at each other out of the corners of their eyes, talked together for a while in their clicking, chirping tongue and then squatted down on the ground. One only, a very old man named Tk'we, remained standing. He had a snub nose, wicked little slanting eyes, and a pot belly, and his skin was the color of ancient, well-weathered ivory.

He said, "Oh Tall Men, we are ready to go."

The Chief of the United Nations Mission, dusted his hands together. "Splendid," he said. "How many of you are there, old boy?"

"All that you see here," replied Tk'we. "Except for a very few old women, who prefer to remain behind."

The Chief's mouth dropped open. He began to count without knowing what he was doing. There were, as a matter of fact, one thousand and thirty-eight Bushmen present. Tearing at his curly blond hair, the Chief replied that this was not democratic, and that they must exercise their right to hold a free election by secret ballot, and that they must choose a smaller committee. He was a very conscientious young man, a graduate of the University of Toronto.

Tk'we, leaning on his bow, said that a man didn't get the chance to see the Gods with his own eyes every day in the year, and that consequently they all wanted to go. He said that they did not understand this democracy, and that they didn't want to make any trouble, but that nobody wanted to hurt anyone else's feelings. He said that if he understood this election business properly, it meant that a man would have to say that someone should go and many other someones should remain behind. If that was the case, who was going to be so rude and unfeeling as to deny his neighbors the right to take a ride in an airplane and see the Gods in person, and get presents?

Furthermore, he added, nobody wanted to leave his women and children behind to look out for themselves. "What is more," he said, in his gentle, humorous, clicking voice, "we have never been out in the world, and a few of us would be very frightened. But if we all go together, we will take courage from each other."

He finished by saying that if this arrangement was not satisfactory, the people would be glad to call the whole thing off and return to their peaceful ways in the desert, good-bye, and thank you very much.

The Chief of the Mission thought about Spokesman's level chilling gaze that was all pupil

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and no whites, and about the pointing finger of Spokesman's companion, and wondered what other disagreeable ways the Visitors might have of showing their displeasure. So one thousand, thirty-eight members of the United Nations Mission had to yield up their places in the planes and were left behind at Windhoek, Serowe, and Bulawayo—because a delegation of three or four small Bushmen had been anticipated—and the Bushmen got into the planes and were taken off into the skies, clinging to each other and silent in delighted terror. It was months before some of the abandoned members of the Mission got home again.

"To scenes of unprecedented pandemonium," in the poetic words of the Associated Press reporter, the Bushmen were disembarked and taken by bus to the United Nations building. At the directions of Spokesman, the General Assembly hall was cleared except for the Secretary-General and his interpreter, a brilliant young Bantu student of African languages. The grumbling delegates were moved to other meeting halls from which they could observe the proceedings by television, and the one thousand, thirty-eight Bushmen, looking with alarm at the incomprehensible murals and other decorations, and at the fixtures and the curving rows of seats, huddled in the aisles and along the walls. Their children, however, wide-eyed and merry, sat or stood on the seats.

Spokesman and his companions faced them from the podium. Piled against the wall were a number of wooden crates and cases which the Visitors had had brought in, that morning. The Secretary-General, repeatedly mopping his forehead with a large handkerchief settled himself in an armchair, and Spokesman rose and addressed the Bushmen in their own language—or rather, languages, for he had to employ three related but slightly dissimilar dialects.

"My friends," he said, and there was a little stir and then utter quiet, for the Bushmen were not accustomed to being addressed in this way by other people. "We have come from the stars to speak with you. We know how hard your lives are, but we know also how you live, simply and merrily, meeting each day as best you can, going softly among the lions and the wild bees, harming no one, but taking what is fitting. Now the time has come for you to tell us what you want above all else, and that which you ask we will give you."

There was a pause, during which many turned their eyes toward Tk'we. At last, the old man moved down to the front of the hall and stood under the rostrum. He leaned on a smooth stick,

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with one foot drawn up so that its sole rested against his other thigh, and although he was less than five feet tall he managed somehow to look very dignified.

"Master," he said, "we are content to have flown in the sky, to have seen this great *werf* with its high tower and shining windows and strange people, and to have beheld you and the other gods with our own eyes. Now, all that we want is to go home again."

Spokesman said, "We can make you richer than all other men. We will teach you how to build *scherms* like this one you stand in, how to wear splendid clothing, how to cure all your ills, how to fly through the air yourselves and speak to other men at a great distance."

Tk'we looked over his shoulder at the others for a long time. He shrugged. "As for me," he said, "I do not want those things. If the Gods will give me some meat, I will not refuse it. Also, some medicines to cure the aches in my bones; that would be very good. But why should I want to fly, or to live in one of these great *scherms*? What I want is to be left alone."

Behind him, hundreds of soft voices murmured discreetly: "Yes, yes, that is so. Meat and some medicines. Do not forget tobacco. Perhaps a little tea, that would be nice."

"I think those are the gifts we expect, Master," said Tk'we, grinning. "If you gave us all the other things, then for a little while perhaps we would seem like great men. But then the Bantus and the white men would come and quarrel with us, and there would be war, as there was in the old days, when many Bushmen were killed and we were driven into the desert.

"It is this way with me," he went on. "I was a good hunter, and I loved hunting. Also, I liked to lie with women. You cannot give me those things again. Nor can you give them to the young men, for they already have them. Now, I like to have a full belly. I enjoy seeing the children play about, and I love to see the young people dance. Sometimes, when my heart is heavy or full of longing, I like to sit apart and play on the *guashi* and sing the songs I have invented. You cannot give me these things, for I already have them.

"What other things are there for men? No one needs more. If he says that he does, he is not yet a man but a child, who, no matter what he has always desires more, and looks from the bag of *tsi* nuts that he has to the bag someone else has. But we are not all children. Therefore, give us the promised gifts and let us go."

Spokesman nodded. He motioned to his companions, and they went and opened the cases.

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They dragged them down into the audience and began passing out packets of razor blades, pipes, good hunting knives, first-aid kits, small mirrors, boxes of tobacco, soap, tea, lumps of sugar and of salt. They opened other cases and handed round cured hams, flitches of bacon, smoked sausages, and other delicacies. Each Bushman received a small knapsack into which he could stuff his gifts, and even the children were not forgotten. Then, with much hand-waving and smiling and bowing, they filed out of the hall and crowded into the waiting buses.

When they had gone, Spokesman and his companions went out to the plaza before the building and opened their collapsible vehicle. The other four stepped into it, but Spokesman beckoned to the Secretary-General and with an unexpected, kindly gesture put a hand on his shoulder.

"Please give orders," he said, "to clear the area around our ship, for we will be departing for home as soon as we have returned to it. Also, please see to it that the vast numbers of spies from all your member nations are warned to retire. I regret that they were unable to get through the force field we placed about the ship, but I think they would have learned very little in any case. Farewell, and good luck to you. It may be that one day you will all reach the level of the Bushmen—stranger things have happened. In that case, we will return."

The Secretary-General sighed. "You knew they would take nothing," he said. "You had the cases ready. Or did you change them, somehow, with some juggling I didn't notice?"

"We knew," said Spokesman.

"But—how?"

"It is what makes them—hmm—pre-Federable."

"But *we* would know what to do with your gifts!" cried the Secretary-General. "My God, think of the things we could do—any of us—one of our great nations—"

Spokesman looked at the Secretary-General with compassion, and smiled. When he did so, he looked suddenly and surprisingly like old Tk'we.

"It is a shame, isn't it?" he said.

After all, he was himself no more than human.

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This story was recommended to The Magazine of Fantasy and Science Fiction by Ray Bradbury, whose influence upon its style and structure is manifest. Less manifest (to North American eyes, at least), but surely present, is the influence of the author's native Chile: on the upper coast the burning deserts of nitrate, in the distant south the cold-howling fury of the Magellanean Straits; Inca remains—gaunt, cyclopean ruins crouching on gaunt Andean peaks— and the fierce, barbaric integrity of the unconquered Araucanians; glowing with color, the rich fields and vineyards; civilization, science, and culture, and even (recently, a guest at the University of Concepción) Allen Ginsberg . . . Hugo Correa, who wrote this story in English, is twenty-six years old, the author of the two first science fiction novels published in Chile, and of many short stories and articles appearing in leading Chilean newspapers and magazines.

THE LAST ELEMENT

by Hugo Correa

GREAT LUMINOUS AREAS, green, red and blue, pierced the planet. They were most abundant between the tropics, gradually diminishing toward the poles, resembling ulcers on a dark and wrinkled skin. The old world was a corpse. The sun, in the throes of agony, sent forth blood-red rays.

"Twenty-five minutes to land, captain! Radiation has diminished. It comes particularly from those swamps."

"What's the difference, Juan? The trip is a success, isn't it?"

"I repeat my suggestion, captain: it would be better to remain in orbit for a couple of days, until we can determine exactly the behavior of this radioactivity. Its fitfulness is suspicious."

"No. We have no time for that. Element Z is sure to be found here in its natural state and we need it to overcome the rebels. We've got to hurry."

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The land, as it came nearer, was stained red by the dying sun. No signs of life, either vegetable or animal. Ancient mountain ranges worn away by millions of years' erosion. Wide plains and enormous rocky formations, these last seen in low rings around the radiant zones. Clouds of white gas floated over the landscape, stretching in long wisps close to the ground and imperceptibly creeping over it.

"Will the Earth end this way, Juan?"

"I wonder!"

"What's the matter, Juan?"

"Premonitions, captain. There's something down there that makes me nervous. I wonder what happened there?"

"We'll soon find out. As to your premonitions, don't trust them. They'll deceive you most of the time. On the other hand, our instruments are infallible. We can trust *them*!"

The rocket, like an inverted wineglass, raised its pointed prow to the sky. To the North could be seen the first slopes of a rounded mountain range; behind it, that strange, many-colored glow.

"Max and Juan! Take the tractor and go look at that swamp."

Max went ahead. His heavy boots sank at every step leaving deep prints which disappeared in the dark. The ground was now soft and slippery, making the ascent more difficult. Night came but not darkness, for the radiation glow, far and near, provided light enough to see by. A sort of ghostly halo surrounded the stars.

"The sky is different, but it looks familiar somehow, don't you think so, Max?"

He pointed to a constellation in the shape of a cross, made up of eight stars of first magnitude.

The top of the hill. At their feet they saw a blue sandy waste, its surface slightly waved, entirely surrounded by high cliffs. The substance blazed and flickered in some silent activity going on under the explorers' eyes. In spite of its coloring and peculiar vitality, the place lacked beauty.

"I've a feeling we're being watched, Juan! Don't you think the light has increased?"

Behind the glass of their helmets both men could see each other's faces in the bluish glow.

"Yes, that's true. Of course it may only be an optical illusion due to the sunset."

"Look!"

Suddenly the wavy surface flattened itself out and turned into a smooth blue plain, quietly glimmering. At the same time the emanations changed into a mist which shimmered like hot air over a road in the sun, as though the vast expanse had begun to steam.

"It's changed, Juan, hasn't it?"

"Yes. Let's go. I don't like this at all."

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They turned back. Max gave a last look at the swamp. Waterspouts beginning to whirl were now scattered over the whole plain.

"Juan, I'm sure the place changed when we arrived. As if it had noticed our presence."

Behind them, the light was diminishing rapidly.

The captain listened to the two men in silence.

"Most of the radiations are unknown, captain. I maintain my opinion: let's take off and observe the planet from space."

"No, Juan. In two days we'll have completed our exploration, then we'll take off. To lose a few hours might prove fatal. The outcome of the war depends on us."

The planet slept peacefully. A dull twilight allowed some details to be seen within a reduced radius.

"Are you sure, Pierre? You weren't daydreaming?"

"You know I'm not in the habit of daydreaming, captain. I saw two figures that looked like Juan and Max. They were walking toward the swamp. You see that the light has increased. I couldn't be mistaken."

Midnight.

"D'you think there are people here, captain?"

"Who could live in this atmosphere?"

"Some creature adapted to the place. Maybe—"

"Well?"

"Well, it's possible some other expedition has got here before us. The rebels, for instance."

"That's impossible, Joe! No one knew our destination."

The captain went to the observation window. A purplish light illuminated the scene. It lit up the hills about five hundred yards away from the rocket, which marked the end of the hollow where they had landed and also the beginning of the swamp.

"Joe! Pierre! Take the tractor and make a quick inspection: I still believe yours was a vision. But we must make sure."

The light was intense. Far off, the different shades combined to form a fantastic color scheme. The tractor started in a straight line to the swamp.

"Why didn't you wake us at once?"

"I didn't know what to do, Joe. I only came to my senses when I found that no one had left the rocket. Here's a way up!"

He drove the tractor toward an opening in the hillside. The bottom of the pass, though irregular and swampy, was as wide as a sidewalk and would let the tractor climb easily.

"No wonder I thought Max and Juan were hiding something."

The two men stared at the peculiar city. The walls and roofs of the low, symmetrical buildings sparkled softly. The wide, well-

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kept streets seemed to be built of the same material as the houses. There was no rubble to be seen.

"Have you found anything?"

Pierre gestured to Joe to be quiet.

"Nothing yet, captain."

"I'm convinced that you had a nightmare, Pierre." The captain's voice sounded harshly in their earphones.

"Why did you lie?" Joe asked, after a moment.

"For a very simple reason. Juan and Max must have seen the same thing we have. But they kept quiet about it. Why? We'll do no harm by keeping the secret a few minutes more, will we?"

The men got out of the tractor and went nearer.

"Funny we didn't notice it from the air!"

"The buildings are the same color as the sand. They don't stand out. The radiation shimmer makes them invisible from the air."

"I'm going to take a look at that city. Wait here for me in case anything happens."

He began to climb down nimbly, clinging to the rocks. At his feet, a wide smooth street ended at the cliffside. The man put his foot out and placed it on the pavement.

"It's as solid as concrete, Joe."

He started up the street between the houses.

"The radiation is tremendous. These streets are a real labyrinth, Joe. The houses have no openings or windows of any kind. What use could they be?"

Pierre's figure glowed the same as the city itself. He was already half a block away, close to a building which rose at the end of the avenue.

"What's the matter?"

"Wait a minute—There are words engraved on the metal, Joe! It's a name. My God!"

Joe had no time to answer. The scene suddenly quivered like jelly. The buildings burst into bubbles, in a twinkling the landscape flattened out into a furiously boiling lake. There was a soundless bubbling. The light increased blindingly and diminished at once. At Joe's feet appeared a flat smooth surface, light blue in color, slowly dying out.

"Joe! Pierre! What's happening? What do those lights mean? Answer me!"

Joe was still there, clinging to a rock, his eyes fixed on the swamp. Max and Juan had to separate Joe's frozen fingers to carry him to the tractor. Sixty feet down, the swamp glimmered. Pierre did not appear.

As they returned, the men noticed that the general luminosity died down considerably. Once more night reigned.

In the space ship Joe's body was subjected to a detailed exami-

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nation. His eyes were closed and he was placed in the freezer, where he would remain until they returned to Earth.

The three men met in the navigation cabin.

"Why did they stop reporting to us? They were silent for at least ten minutes before Joe's final cry."

"Joe saw something," commented the captain somberly. "Maybe he saw Pierre die."

The planet, asleep now, sent out a soft glimmering which the men could see from the windows.

"He must have fallen into the swamp, captain. Joe was at the edge of the cliff. Maybe Pierre got too close to the edge and fell in."

"And the figures that Pierre saw?"

The captain could not control a sigh.

"That's something we'll never know, Max."

The captain couldn't sleep. He went to the navigation cabin and looked out. The light had increased again. The surroundings were visible to a considerable distance. There were worse places, undoubtedly. Mercury, for one. There you found lakes of steaming lead, hot gases sweeping rocky plains, and on the side which the sun's rays never reached the temperature was close to absolute zero. But, in spite of all that, it had an innocent look.

But here . . . The star was dying. Where does a world's evolution end? When does its sun go out? Or does evolution continue, developing and adjusting itself to new climatic conditions? On Earth itself, man had no reason to believe that he would be the last created being. Any catastrophe could put an end to his existence: the very war which was imminent and which had caused the present expedition in search of new elements of destruction.

The captain was visibly agitated . . . *The effects of atomic war!* After a lapse of centuries radioactivity could form a malignant silt, shapeless but forever clinging to the face of its planet. Those strange, life-endowed pustules . . . The remains of the lost race could well be amalgamated there. A new form of life. Or death. A cancer of the planets. The last element. That was *it*: element Z. The captain felt suddenly calm. The expedition's objective was foremost again. The search for unknown element Z, the existence of which was only the fruit of calculation and conjecture. The theory was that its radiations could be transmitted through any protective substance and that it disintegrated quickly and silently. It was believed to be able to cover a surface of millions of square miles in twenty-four hours, exterminating all living beings.

He was looking at the top of a

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hill when he saw a human figure emerge. The captain focused his televisor: there was Pierre in his space suit; he saw him wave his arms; his knees bent and he fell to the ground.

"He's less than five hundred yards away, Max. His radio must be out of order. Go and bring him back by yourself. Don't go near the swamp! Understand? Don't even look at it!"

Max stopped next to the group of rocks where Joe was found.

"A hundred and fifty yards to your left, Max!"

"I can't go on with the tractor, captain. I'm leaving it here."

The ground was rocky but Max managed to advance rapidly. Sometimes a rock would hide the rocket from him. Other times he had to slip between masses of granite set close together.

"There's Pierre, captain! He's dragging his feet. I'm going after him."

"Hurry, Max. Maybe he's crazy, like Joe. Be careful."

Pierre disappeared near the hill. No cracks or caves could be seen where Pierre might have gone in. Max searched the ground with his torch: an opening began at the foot of the hill and sank into the ground with a slight downward slope.

"It's like a tunnel, captain."

"Go on, Max. Try the ground at every step before you advance."

The passage widened out at about forty yards from the entrance. Its solid slippery floor suggested an artificial origin. Max had to be most careful not to slip.

"No footprints, captain. The floor is covered with a thin coating of silt. This must have been a mine or a shelter."

Now and again the tunnel turned. Sometimes it sloped downward and sometimes it rose, always gradually, so that it was impossible to calculate its level with regard to the top. After having advanced a thousand yards Max calculated that he must be somewhere near the landing place.

All of a sudden the man felt overcome by an unexpected sense of peace and quiet. Gone was the tension that had not left him since he began to follow Pierre. He went forward again with unlooked for enthusiasm and contentment. A hundred yards ahead a pale light from outside entered the tunnel.

"The tunnel is ending, captain."

"What about Pierre?"

"Nothing yet. But I'm sure I'm going to find him."

"Why?"

"I don't know. Premonition."

"Stop having premonitions! What's wrong with you?"

"Nothing. I feel very well. It's something new."

"Come back, Max! Do you understand? Come back at once!"

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"Don't shout so loud, captain! You make me deaf. There's Pierre!"

"Pierre?"

"Yes . . . but . . . I'm back where I started from!"

"What's that? What do you mean?"

"Ha! Ha! Old Pierre . . . He's walking toward the rocket! He's less than fifty yards away, captain. He's nearing the rocket from behind. D'you understand? Look North. I'm coming out of the tunnel. I can see Pierre's footprints in the sand—"

A howl was heard.

"Stop, Max! Nobody's coming. To the North there's only a plain three miles long. Go back! It's an order!"

"But . . . I'm only a hundred yards from the rocket. Pierre is waiting for me right next to it. He's waving to me! *My God! The ground's sinking!"*

The captain followed Max's course. The tunnel's mouth opened on a level with the swamp which stretched as far as the eye could see, quiet and glimmering.

"Juan: Max saw a mirage. Do you notice how the glow has faded? As soon as it's light we'll load the rocket and take off."

"Let's not wait any more, captain. Come back and let's return at once!"

"Are you crazy, Juan? What do you think we've come for? A pleasure trip? Or do you think the death of two men will make me return empty-handed?"

"And the visions? How do you explain them?"

"Heaven knows! Some optical disturbance caused by the changing luminosity."

The captain fell silent. All at once the swamp had lost its wavy appearance; its glowing surface turned dull and took on the appearance and solidity of concrete. At the man's feet there was now a huge airfield lit by a radiance like moonlight. On the left rose a lofty control tower. In the center of the vision, proud and shining, rose a space ship ready to take flight. The captain stifled a cry: on the ship's side could be seen its identification number.

Five uniformed figures emerged, one by one, from a trap door on the left. The captain recognized himself as the one heading the group. One after the other he recognized Juan, Joe, Max and Pierre walking quickly toward the rocket.

One by one—himself at the end—they disappeared inside the space ship. There could be no doubt about it; he was watching the take-off of his own rocket when it went out into interstellar space some time back. Lights changed at the control tower. Once again he heard the flight chief's hard dry voice counting the seconds. Instinctively he

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stepped back when the count ended.

Waves of fire and smoke appeared under the ship, reaching almost as far as the captain. Slowly it began to rise, supported by ten fiery columns which hit the ground in clouds of sparks. He thought he could hear the furious roar of the atom disintegrated in the combustion chamber to set free one megaton of domesticated energy.

The vision changed: the same place now under a midday sun. A rocket was coming down on the same spot of the recent take-off. He recognized his own rocket, although badly battered. A man got out and was lost in the crowd before the captain could recognize him. Of one thing he was certain: it wasn't himself.

Suddenly the onlookers became excited: several arms pointed skywards. The crowd fled precipitatly. Only then did he recognize the pilot as he ran past, not three yards away, looking upwards in horror. It was Juan.

Another rocket was coming down on a long, fantastically shaped tongue of fire. It resembled his own, although no identification signs could be seen on its shining side. On landing it shivered all over as if it were not entirely solid. It touched the ground raising a huge phosphorescent wave, blue in color, which clouded the scene like a mist. Before the man's feverish gaze the rocket began to crumble rapidly; its sides turned to jelly and slid to the ground like a shining waterfall. Soon it was nothing but a shapeless mound of radioactive matter speedily flowing over the rocketdrome. The first rocket exploded and crumbled away. The control tower shook and dissolved like a snowman under the sun. Night fell.

At the captain's feet stretched a furiously boiling expanse. It bubbled in silence for several seconds; it quieted down gradually and returned to its usual state of a softly glistening sandy waste.

The man gave a hoarse cry.

"That . . . that's element Z!" he stammered. Then he shouted hoarsely: "Juan! Juan!"

Nobody answered.

"Juan! Juan! What's wrong? Is the radio out of order?"

He tried the transmitter with nervous fingers. No use. He thought he felt a thousand eyes looking at him. He even imagined he heard a low sarcastic laugh from the swamp. He started to run back through the tunnel.

"No. We won't return. They'd follow us. If we go back the Earth will be turned into a planet like this one. Men's spirits will remain chained to radioactive quicksands, to form the last element. I must sacrifice myself. And Juan. I'll lock him up in his cabin and I'll

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steer the rocket to the other end of the universe."

He had to climb. He slipped at every step of that endless tunnel. What could it have been before? Doubtless the race that peopled the planet in the past had searched for minerals like men did: tearing the vitals of the earth to quench their thirst for riches and power.

His heart was hammering. His temples beat, a bitter taste was on his tongue. At last he was in the open. He stopped to regain his breath. East, the sky was red. The dying sun was on the point of rising. He had been over two hours in the tunnel! Before he could master his amazement he saw a red light emerge from the landing field. A flame flowing powerfully under a well-known object.

"God! The rocket! Juan! Wait for me!" He ran wildly on, raising his arms skywards.

"Juan!"

The rocket had gathered speed. The sky was turning red. Against it you could hardly see the jet flames which carried the rocket back to earth. Juan hadn't waited any more. Terrified by the solitude, the captain's silence and the intense luminosity of the swamp, he had fled.

The captain ran this way and that. He climbed, he fell and rose again with powerful bursts of energy. At last, exhausted and defeated, he went to lean on some low black rocks. Behind them stretched the swamp. The sun's scarlet light, mixed with the bluish glow, produced a ghostly effect.

The captain, hoarsely panting, saw that a familiar shape began to rise from the swamp in a furious swirl of radiant particles. It was a rocket. Below it there was a storm of blue bubbles and waves. It rose, lurching grotesquely. Behind it, the blood-red globe of the sun emerged slowly. Its rays touched the sides of the ascending ship.

The captain, his mouth, eyes and skin dry, saw that it was gathering speed with extraordinary swiftness. His expert gaze saw it set a Southeasterly course. It was about to enter the escape orbit. With a very few seconds' delay it had started in pursuit of Juan.

And it carried within it the coveted element.

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Evan had suffered most of his life from a nagging little worry about whether he was, or was not, there today.

The End of Evan Essant...?

by Sylvia Edwards

"How long have you been suffering from this feeling that you are about to pass out of the picture, as you put it?" the psychiatrist asked as he made a notation on the new case-history card headed, "Essant, E."

"It's never seemed so imminent as it does now," the thin, long-legged young man with the horn-rimmed spectacles replied, "but I was haunted by the idea even as a child. I was always near-sighted, and before I was fitted with the proper glasses, everything a short distance away would blur. I thought I blurred like that when people looked at me, I could look at myself in a mirror and verify it. Then one of my teachers—I think it was in the second or third grade—explained the pun in my name to the class one day, and after that the kids would chant doggerel at me,

'Evan Essant, fade away—
Are you here or not today?'"

"Evanescent," the doctor said as if to himself, "very interesting!"

"My mother has a limited command of English," the patient explained. "She just didn't realize that the name she gave me, when put before our family name, sounds like a word. But as a kid, I thought she'd done it on purpose. And I was a little ashamed of her, because of her foreign accent. To compensate, I set out to master the language. But my father would have been happier if I'd developed my muscles instead of my vocabulary. He was a stocky, powerfully built man, a fireman on the railroad. I've often wished I were more like him, and I guess he did, too."

"You were an only child?" the doctor asked.

"I always thought I was. Until today, I believed I was the only son my mother ever bore. But you won't understand about that until I tell you the rest of it. After my father died, in a wreck, the pension was barely enough to take care of my mother, so I had to quit school and earn my living. The

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Army wouldn't have me, of course, on account of my eyes, and I didn't have the nerve to ask for a job. What employer would want a nonentity like me? But I would write a story, and put stamps on it, and mail it, and sometimes they didn't come back."

"Do you write under your own name?"

"Why do people always ask a writer that? No, I picked the one field in which I could make no name for myself whatever."

"You mean you signed your stories, 'Anonymous'?"

"Not even that. These were confession stories. Evidently you never read a confession magazine, doctor."

"I can't recall that I did," the doctor admitted.

"Well, look at one, sometime. There are no authors. There is a title, then a first person story. In the place where the by-line belongs, there's nothing."

"Significant," the doctor commented. "Were you under a compulsion to write for this one type of magazine only?"

"Possibly. Looking back, it does seem that I went out of my way to make sure there would be no printed evidence of my existence. But at the time I was thinking of practical reasons. Since I had the confession technique down pat, and was dependent on writing for a living, my agent advised me not to spend too much time experimenting. Not that I was particularly proud of being a confession writer. There are plenty of markets and pretty good rates, but it's not the type of writing a man ordinarily does. These stories deal with the problems of female characters between the ages of sixteen and twenty-two."

"What kind of problems?" the doctor asked.

"Well, here are the titles of some of my stories. *Were We Too Young for Love—Was It Really Love He Wanted—Was It Wrong to Give Him Love?—I Lost the Love of My Baby's Father—I Blamed Her for Stealing My Husband's Love—Love Came Too Soon—Could I Ever Love Him Again.* . . . Do you want to hear any more of them?"

"No, that gives me a rough idea."

"Rough is right. The trouble was, I didn't believe in love at first sight. But the minute the female character meets a crew-cut male character with a strong body and a weak mind, she always knows he is the one. As a matter of fact, I didn't believe in love, period. Yet I had to write about it in order to eat."

"Perhaps you just didn't believe anyone could love a nonentity, as you call yourself," the doctor suggested.

"I guess that was it. But I gritted my teeth, and made a living of a sort from confessions for about

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six years. I went a long time between haircuts, and lived in a furnished room with a single window overlooking an alley. I didn't care how the place looked, because nobody ever came to see me. I'd pound my portable grimly all day, and in the evening, when I emerged from my cell, I'd wrap myself in a cloak of invisibility. The other tenants passed me in the halls as if I weren't there. Even the landlady didn't speak to me unless the rent was due. Sundays, I went to my mother's for dinner, the rest of the time I cooked in a converted closet called a kitchenette. I didn't have a car, I'd never been on a dance floor, I didn't drink and I was never invited to any parties. I didn't even go to the movies very often—other fellows my age would be there with their dates. So I spent most of my evenings at the branch public library.

"I hadn't lived much, but I lived vicariously in the printed page. I read about everything from Aard-Vark to Xenophobia. But after a certain pretty librarian started to work there, I didn't get so much reading done. I'd sit at a table facing the desk, pretending to read, but watching her quick, feminine motions over the top of the book. Sometimes I pretended to take notes while I composed sonnets abut her. I did a lot of daydreaming about how to break the ice, but I never got to first base with the librarian. A crew-cut male character with a strong body and a weak mind stole her right out from under my nose."

"I gathered as much," the doctor said sympathetically.

"But shortly after this, something very surprising happened. If you'll pardon my talking like a writer, it was completely out of character for me."

"I see," the doctor said, forming a steeple with the finger-tips of his two hands, "and the minute you saw the young lady, you knew she was the one."

"I didn't say that!" Evan protested, sitting up on the couch. Then, as he sank back again, he added, rather sheepishly, "But that's how it happened, for both of us. My agent had just sent me a check for a story, so I put on my one good suit and took a bus to downtown Ellay to have a decent meal for a change. I was sitting at a small table in Clifton's cafeteria, eating lunch.

"There were a bunch of slick chicks at another table nearby, with pony tails, too much eye makeup, skin-tight Capri pants and men's shirts too big for them. They were giggling and cutting up, obviously angling for some strange men to pick them up. They were too young to be doing that, too—one of them still had braces on her teeth.

"Another girl came walking across the room with her tray, and the contrast between her and these

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others—well, you could tell at a glance that she was a lady. She was wearing a modest full skirt, and a demure little ruffled shirt-waist buttoned high at the throat, and she didn't walk in a suggestive manner, if you know what I mean."

"I know what you mean," the doctor assured him.

"Well, when this girl put her tray on my table, and sat down in the chair opposite me, our eyes met over the Spanish rice, and we knew. I don't know how I had the nerve to speak to her—I guess I was just talking aloud, to myself. I said I'd written that scene a hundred times, and never believed until now that it could actually happen.

"'Are you *really* a writer?' she asked, making it sound as if being a writer was the most wonderful thing in the world. I modestly admitted that I'd had quite a few short stories published, and she asked the usual question, 'Do you write under your own name?' I didn't intend to admit, at this point, that I'd never had a by-line. I certainly didn't want her to call me mister, and I wasn't going to say, 'My name is Evan Essant,' and have her laugh in my face. So I got tongue-tied, and she came to my rescue.

"'Please don't tell me,' she begged. 'Let me give you a name that fits you.' So she thought a minute and said, 'I'm going to call you Mark.' That unlimbered my tongue, and I asked why Mark fit me. She said, 'Because you'll make your mark in the world.'

"Even after Elaine met my mother, and knew my right name is Evan, she kept on calling me Mark, and every time I heard her say it, I remembered the meaning she attached to it. Elaine Kincaid and I saw a lot of each other. There was something about being with her, about the tone of her voice and the way she looked up to me, that made me feel like somebody, for the first time in my life. If a girl like her could believe in me, how could I help beginning to believe in myself? Then, when I got the idea of marrying her—"

"This was *your* idea?" the doctor interrupted.

"Of course it was. Elaine isn't the type to cheapen herself by throwing herself at men. But on the other hand, I couldn't quite bring myself to asking her in so many words—I had so little to offer her. By this time, however, I'd confessed I wrote confessions, and Elaine said she wanted to read some of my stories. So I just gave her a magazine. She got the point right away. She read the story to herself up to the place where the male character proposes. Then she read the proposal out loud, and said, 'Oh, Mark, you have such a poetic way of asking a girl to marry you—how can I resist you?' So it was all settled."

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"Clever of you to give her a magazine when she asked for it," the doctor commented drily.

"That's what Elaine thought. She said it was the most original way of proposing she'd ever heard of, and the girls at the office would never get over it. I'm trying to think of the full name of the outfit she works for—she generally just calls it Northwest—"

"Northwest Mounted Police?" the doctor suggested, helpfully.

"No! Northwest Fidelity Mutual, I think. It's an insurance company. She said she wanted to keep her job for at least a year after we were married, so I could quit grinding away at confession stories, and write a book."

"Did her parents approve of this?" the doctor asked.

"Not exactly. Her father's blustering didn't bother me much—I put it down to his chronic bad temper. But her mother really got my goat. She called me—a nobody."

"You shouldn't have taken it literally."

"That's what Elaine said. That I should pay no attention to her mother; she'd soon be talking out of the other side of her mouth, bragging about her son-in-law, the famous author. Elaine was of age, so there wasn't much they could do about it. But under the circumstances, we didn't want her folks spending a lot of money on an elaborate church wedding. So we had a quiet ceremony before a J.P. on a Saturday afternoon, with the Kincaids and my mother as witnesses. To say my mother was delighted is an understatement. She had almost reconciled herself to the idea that I'd be a bachelor all my days, but not quite.

"We moved into a comfortable furnished apartment Elaine found; the only piece of furniture we had to buy was a desk for my typewriter, to replace the battered table I'd used in my furnished room. The following Monday, when Elaine went to her office, I started outlining my book. It was to be a science-fiction novel called SOL, the autobiography of the sun, told as if it were a conscious entity."

"Sounds like an ambitious project," the doctor said.

"Oh, I was full of ambition. I did a lot of research, and turned out more finished wordage than I ever had before. Elaine is a cracker-jack typist, she copied each chapter in the evenings as I finished it. Besides that, she's a wonderful cook. I was gaining weight, in spite of my heavy writing schedule."

"You didn't plan on having a family right away, I gather," the doctor said.

"No, the apartment building doesn't allow children. We figured on using the advance royalties from the book as the down payment on a little house—then no

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landlord could dictate to us like that. I was well into chapter seven, in which Sol shrinks to a white dwarf star, throwing off great showers of planetesimal material as it contracts. And just as the sun was giving birth to its family of planets, Elaine informed me that she was pregnant. I don't know which was the more cataclysmic event, from my point of view.

"I was still trying to grasp the full import of this revelation when she sprung the rest of it. She wanted me to be free to continue working on the book full time, and not to rush it, so she intended to keep on working for five or six months—five or six months, mind you—and then ask her father for money.

"She was talking like a stock character in an old-style confession story, the brave little unwed mother carrying the fatherless child. So what did that make me? Nobody. How my mother-in-law would love to have *that* to throw up to me! I wasn't going to give her the satisfaction. I'd show them who wore the pants in this family!

"When I got my one good suit out of the cleaners, I could wear the pants all right, but the vest wouldn't button. Maybe it was Elaine's good cooking, or maybe my chest had expanded two inches since I learned I was a prospective papa. At the employment agency, they were looking for a man who could handle the English language, to dictate letters. They sent me to one of the big oil companies, where I was given some aptitude tests and hired over several other applicants, in spite of my lack of business references. A man named Bowen had been transferred to their Cincinnati office, and they were in a hurry to fill his position before a backlog of mail piled up, so they told me to report for work in the morning. It was a good thing I didn't try to wear the vest, because on the way home I took a deep breath and a button popped off my shirt.

"I decided to send the book to my agent the way it was—seven completed chapters and an outline of the rest. Publishers seldom sign a contract with an unknown author for an uncompleted book, but I was in such an optimistic mood that I felt SOL was good enough to be one of the rare exceptions. If it brought contract, I could complete it in the evenings. Elaine had been working two shifts, and if a little thing like her had that much stamina, some extra work certainly wasn't going to hurt me any."

"Well, bless my superego!" the doctor exclaimed, "She *did* make a man of you!"

"There remained the question of what pen-name to use. Elaine's name for me, Mark, was a natural for the first part. We were casting

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around for a surname when it struck both of us at once—Clifton, in honor of the cafeteria where we met. I rolled a sheet of paper into my typewriter and typed out a title page,

"SOL—a novel by Mark Clifton.

"Reading over my shoulder, Elaine said, 'Mark Clifton. That's good. Somehow it just *sounds* like a science-fiction writer.'

"I thought it was good, too. In fact, I liked it so well that I even used it for the return address on the envelope, and wrote it over my own name on the mailbox downstairs. The next morning, I mailed the manuscript on my way downtown, without any cover letter to my agent, without any explanation to him of how a nameless confession writer whose checks he used to make out 'E. Essant' had suddenly become a science-fiction writer using the pseudonym of 'Mark Clifton.' Then I dismissed the matter from my mind and concentrated on my new job.

"I've been working on the eighteenth floor of a new air-conditioned building, in a big office that houses sixteen correspondents. We handle a large volume of mail from the general public—letters addressed to the Company rather than to any specific department, branch, or individual. I soon learned that most of my fellow correspondents, having been hired for the same reason I was, are frustrated writers. I was accorded considerable respect because I had actually sold some short stories, and particularly because I had a book-length going the rounds.

"Elaine planned on quitting her job very soon—she was just waiting until the girls at the office could 'surprise' her with a baby shower. That was a wonderful time for us. Copying the book had been keeping us home evenings, but now we went for long walks together. Funny, but I'd never really noticed before how little she is. She was always so capable and energetic, I'd thought of her as larger. But as we walked down the street, she hardly came up to my shoulder, and she seemed to lean on my arm more than she used to. It made me throw my shoulders back and breathe deep, stand tall, instead of slumping over to minimize my height as I used to do.

"The most wonderful day of all was the day my agent's telegram arrived. Elaine hadn't felt so well that morning, and had stayed home from work, so she called me up and read it to me over the phone. I remember every word of it.

"'GOOD WORK, MARK. R&S OFFER CONTRACT. SOL. A THOUSAND ADVANCE, HALF ON SIGNING, HALF ON COMPLETION JUNE FIFTEEN. CAN DO? —BARNEY.

"Lucy Prentice, the branch

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switchboard operator on our floor, listened in as usual and in fifteen minutes had the news all over the office. My fellow-workers came over to shake my hand, the vice-president in charge of public relations, who heads up five departments including ours, sent me a note in the inter-office mail, and even Miss Smith, the office manager, a sour old maid if there ever was one, extended grudging congratulations.

"One of the biggest and oldest publishing houses in the country, the first publishers to read SOL, had grabbed the first book manuscript I ever submitted in uncompleted form. Neither Elaine nor I saw anything fishy in that. She said she knew all along I had it in me and phoned her mother to indulge in some I-told-you-so talk. I sent Barney a wire consisting of two words, 'YES, MARK.'

"But it didn't seem quite real until the following night, at eleven P.M., when the contract arrived air-mail special delivery. I took it down to the office next morning and signed it with the name that was to appear on the book before a notary in the comptroller's office on the tenth floor. Then I put an air-mail stamp on it and deposited it lovingly in a sack of company mail. That was a Saturday, I picked Elaine up at Northwest at noon and we went out to celebrate.

"First we went to look at a car I'd seen advertised and before I knew it I'd signed another contract, but this time with my right name. I needed a car, of course; if I was going to finish the book by June fifteenth, I couldn't waste so much time commuting by bus. But the salesman talked me into a later model and higher payments than I'd anticipated.

"Then we picked up the first tailor-made suit I'd ever owned in my life, which I'd ordered the week before. Elaine put on the short formal she never gets a chance to wear, and we wound up in a rather plush restaurant where they have an orchestra. I protested that I couldn't dance, but we ordered a bottle of champagne; after all, signing a contract for a first novel is something that happens only once in a lifetime. After two glasses of it, that dance floor didn't look so formidable. Elaine said I was doing fine, and a couple of hours later, I remember vaguely that I was dancing in a haze of champagne with a blonde in a green dress with sequins all over it that clung to her like scales to a fish. After that Elaine took me home; she said I was learning too fast.

"Two days later, the doorbell woke us an hour before the alarm clock was due to ring. I expected it to be another air-mail special with my copy of the contract, signed by the publishers, and Barney's check for four hundred and fifty, the

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first of what I hoped would be a long series of royalty checks on SOL. Instead it was a night-letter. I signed my pen name and tore it open. It read,

"'R&S LEGAL STAFF SAY YOUR SIGNATURE DOES NOT CONFORM TO SIGNATURE ON PREVIOUS CONTRACT. WHAT'S THE MATTER, MARK, HITTING THE BOTTLE? PHONE AT ONCE. —BARNEY.'

"Elaine came in just as the Western Union boy left, wrapping her blue housecoat around her. I handed her the wire. 'What previous contract?' she asked puzzled.

"I was beginning to have a horrible suspicion as to who had signed the previous contract, but I refused to believe it until the library opened, and I checked the authors' index. I had a migraine coming on and my eyes blurred so I could hardly read the cards, but I found it. No wonder Elaine thought the name 'Mark Clifton' sounded like a science-fiction writer. He is one. Barney would have caught it, but the actual Clifton is his client, too. My address was different, of course, but writers sometimes move. I had made a ghastly, unforgivable mistake."

"Not a mistake," the doctor said, "I would call it a classic case of a buried urge to self-destruction, implemented by unconscious memory. You had read the real Clifton's work and had consciously forgotten it, but your subconscious retained the name."

"Too pat," Evan objected, "Would it be possible for me to arrange unconsciously to meet a girl in Clifton's cafeteria, and unconsciously convey to her the idea of calling me Mark? At a time, I might add, when I had no use for a pen-name, being a confession writer? And did I unconsciously select the same literary agent who handles Clifton's work, several years before that, just so I could ultimately defeat my own purpose?"

"Quite possible," the doctor said.

"Well, it's no more impossible than some of the other things that have been happening to me, come to think of it," Evan conceded. "At any rate, I ran up a big long-distance bill, conveying my abject apologies to Barney. He said he believed me but he was afraid that when the publishers found out they weren't taking up their option on Clifton's next book, they would withdraw their offer. That's just what they did, though they were very decent about it. They didn't reproach me for trying to cash in on another author's reputation; they simply said that, since this was a first novel, they would prefer to see it in completed form.

"I realized that any other publishers would say the same thing, and when I got the manuscript back, I tried to complete it eve-

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nings and week-ends. My job wasn't too demanding, and I'm sure I could have written effectively at night under other circumstances. But every time I looked at SOL, a wave of shame would come over me, driving every creative thought out of my head. I crumpled up every page of new copy I tried to write, and threw the balls of paper in the general direction of the waste basket.

"Finally I decided I had to get the manuscript off my desk, give it a cooling off period. So I put the whole thing in the bottom drawer of the dresser in the bedroom. I'm certain that's where I put it, because I recall there was nothing in the drawer but a lot of old socks Elaine hadn't had time to mend, and I threw them out to make room for the book manuscript.

"To get it off my mind, I tried to write other things, but for the first time in my life, I experienced a complete dearth of ideas. I had gone from the height of optimism about my future as a writer to the depths of pessimism, and I began to think my deathless prose would never reach a wider audience than one customer in Keokuk, Iowa. Of course, even if I wasn't getting anywhere as a writer, I still had a lot of things to be thankful for—my wife, my job, and a baby on the way. But telling myself that was as ineffective as telling a man with an aching molar that his other teeth are all right. I didn't realize how much more important these other things were to me until I began to lose them, too.

"After the fiasco about the penname, Elaine stopped calling me Mark, not wanting to remind me of it. I was Evan Essant, again. One evening, while I was helping her dry the dishes, she said, 'Evan, I hate to tell you this, but I'm afraid the baby was a false alarm.'"

"That's not uncommon," the doctor said.

"In my life it's uncommon," Evan replied, "In fact, it was unprecedented. I couldn't help feeling that the baby was a false alarm because I was a false alarm. I should have seen to it that Elaine took better care of herself, instead of letting her keep on working day and night. Maybe I should have slept on the couch in the living room. Don't you think so, doctor?"

"No, I don't think so, but that's not my specialty. You should follow your obstetrician's orders."

"We hadn't even picked one out. That's another thing I blamed myself for. I should have insisted that she go to a doctor at once."

"Not necessarily. But since there had been no medical confirmation, I am inclined to think that your wife was not actually pregnant, that you have no reason to blame yourself. How did she take it?"

"Better than I did, in some

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ways. She said she might as well keep on working until the car was paid for, and I made no objections. My tendency to make decisions had somehow evaporated. Likewise my enthusiasm to do a good job at the office. Little errors have been creeping into my dictation. I've been restless and depressed. I haven't been sleeping well lately and I've lost my appetite, I've lost the weight I gained when we were first married.

"Then last night, after Elaine had gone to bed, I was prowling around the apartment, not knowing what to do with myself. I couldn't find anything I wanted to read, and got the idea of digging SOL out of the bottom drawer, reading it over objectively from the beginning, as if someone else had written it. That way, I thought I might get back into the swing of it.

"Elaine still had the light on, she was propped up on the pillows manicuring her fingernails. I opened the bottom drawer, where I'd put my manuscript a couple of weeks ago, and found it empty. The finished chapters, the two carbons, the outline, even my research notes, had vanished.

"I was having a hard enough time forcing myself to write the concluding chapters; to reconstruct the whole book from the beginning would be virtually impossible. So I worked myself up into a blind rage. I should have known better than to blame Elaine, who had sweated over it with me. Yet what other rational explanation was there? I accused her of throwing SOL out with the trash. When she denied it, I called her a liar.

"I hardly knew what I was saying. I was just dredging up the vilest, bitterest half-truths I could think of to fling at her. It wasn't really the thought of the wasted work that hurt—it was the thought that she'd lost faith in me. And because I was hurt I wanted to make her suffer for it. I wasn't satisfied until I got her crying so she couldn't stop.

"Then I turned my back on her and went to sleep. I don't know what came over me. I woke up briefly about three A.M., I heard her still sobbing softly, and even then I didn't take her in my arms and comfort her. She finally fell asleep through sheer exhaustion, and didn't hear the alarm clock ring.

"By morning, I'd come to my senses. The loss of the book shrank to insignificance beside the stark realization that by lashing out like that, I might have lost the only good thing that ever came into my lonely, ineffectual life, the woman who lay there beside me, sleeping. I was filled with remorse, but I didn't dare awaken her to tell her so. I was afraid she wouldn't forgive me.

"I shaved with a razor—the electric shaver she gave me for

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my birthday makes too much noise. My hands were shaking and I cut myself. I dressed quietly, closed the bedroom door softly behind me, and went to the kitchen to make some breakfast, which I couldn't swallow because I felt like such a heel. I phoned Northwest and told them Elaine wouldn't be in today, that she had a bad cold. On the way downtown, I was thinking that instead of heaping abuses on her head, I should be worshipping at her feet. I was so preoccupied that I got a ticket for driving down the wrong side of the street. I stopped at the florist's shop on the ground floor of the building where I work, selected eleven long-stemmed red roses and a single white one, and told them to deliver them right away.

"By this time I was late for work, and when I got off the elevator on the eighteenth floor, Lucy Prentice seemed disposed to kid me about it. 'May I help you?' she asked, as if I were a stranger to her. So I kidded back, though I really didn't feel up to it. 'I want to see Mr. Essant,' I said. She answered with a straight face, 'We have no Mr. Essant, are you sure you have the right department?'

"Then, when I started to punch in, I found my card missing from its slot. I thought somebody had punched in for me, and misplaced the card, so I went on to my own desk. The nameplate was missing. I looked for it in the top drawer—no nameplate, and nothing else, either. All the drawers were as bare and empty as the dresser drawer at home, where my manuscript had been. Puzzled, I straightened up, to find myself confronting the office manager.

" 'Who took everything out of my desk?' I demanded.

" 'That's Mr. Bowen's desk,' she said acidly, 'He was transferred. And who, may I ask, are you?'

" 'Bowen's replacement,' I told her. 'As you know!'

" 'Personnel has not notified me they hired another man to take his place,' Miss Smith said. By this time all fifteen people at the other desks had turned to look at us. I'd been working among them daily. Yet I didn't see the light of recognition in a single face. I rushed back to the time clock, but I couldn't find my card in any of the slots.

"Until now, my misfortunes had been natural ones, or had seemed so at the time. But this was unnatural, spooky. It was a bad dream, I told myself, and if I could hear Elaine's voice, I would wake up. For the moment I had forgotten that she probably wasn't speaking to me.

"I took the express elevator to the ground floor, closed myself into a drug store phone booth,

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and dialed my home number, ringing it long enough to wake the dead. The dead? My God, had she become so despondent she had turned on the gas without lighting the burners? I scraped two fenders backing out of the parking lot, exceeded the speed limit, and took the stairs of the apartment house two at a time.

"The florist's box had already been delivered; it was in the hall, leaning against our door. I burst into the apartment, calling Elaine's name. Except for my own voice and footsteps, the place was silent. It was a relief not to find her lifeless body, and at first I thought she had simply gone to her office. But when I phoned Northwest, she wasn't there. That left me with no alternative but to conclude that she had left me.

"I looked in her closet. As I had expected, her clothes were gone. But as I certainly had not expected, she had taken everything, rather than the contents of an overnight bag. Even the top of her dressing table was bare, not cluttered as it usually is with all the little evidences of femininity, the half-used bottles of perfume, the scattered bobby pins and hairnets tangled up in costume jewelry.

"To go away for a few days to teach me a lesson was one thing; to go away for good was another. My remorse and concern turned to determination. I was going to bring her back, if I had to carry her. She didn't need to act as if she'd never known a man to lose his temper. Her own father certainly doesn't have the patience of Job. Maybe that was the whole trouble. Elaine was used to a man being master in his own house, and I hadn't acted enough that way. From now on, I was going to change, and I had a hunch that would impress her more than any amount of worshipping at her feet.

"When I dialed the Kincaids' number, my mother-in-law answered, and I asked her, 'Is Elaine there?'

" 'Yes, she is,' the old lady said. 'But she isn't feeling well. She can't come to the phone.'

" 'You mean she doesn't want to talk to me,' I said. 'Well, tell her I know she didn't throw the book away, because some other things have been disappearing at the office. I'm sorry I blamed her for it, but she's making too much of an issue of it.'

" 'I don't understand,' Elaine's mother said.

" 'Never mind!' I told her, "Just tell Elaine not to unpack her bags, because I'm coming right over to get her.'

" 'Who is this, anyway?' the old lady demanded.

" 'Well, who did you think it was?' I asked impatiently.

" 'One of Elaine's boy friends, I suppose,' she replied.

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" '*One* of her boy friends!' I exploded. 'Listen, Mrs. Kincaid. You may think Elaine has brushed me off for good. I imagine you'd like that. But you have another think coming. She doesn't have one single, solitary thing she can use in court, and you know it.'

" 'In court?' my mother-in-law said. 'You must have the wrong number.' And she hung up on me.

"At the time, I didn't see the connection between her reaction and the blank stares of my fellow employees. I just thought I was getting the silent treatment from the whole family, and I wasn't going to stand for it. I drove grimly out to the Kincaids' and when my mother-in-law answered the doorbell, I said, 'All right. I came to apologize. But if she wants me to crawl, I'm not going to do it.'

" 'What on Earth are you talking about?' the old lady asked me.

" 'You know damn well what I'm talking about,' I said, and added, as I handed over the flowers, 'These are for Elaine.'

"Mrs. Kincaid opened the box, though she had no business to, and said, 'Oh, how lovely.'

"Just then, Elaine's old man came into the front hall, in his shirt-sleeves, suspenders, and bedroom slippers. 'Look, Sam,' his wife said to him, 'The girls in Elaine's office sent her some flowers.' He grunted, and she added, 'Well, give the boy a tip.' Kincaid dug into his pants pocket and started to hand me a quarter.

"That did it.

" 'This has gone far enough,' I decided, 'I know my rights and I demand to see Elaine! If she won't come downstairs, I'll just have to go up after her. Get out of my way!'

"I took the open box of flowers out of the old lady's hands and pushed past her. I was in no mood to take no for an answer. But as I started up the stairs, a calloused hand attached to a beefy arm grabbed me by the collar. Elaine's father held me at arm's length, glaring at me as if I were a noxious insect he was about to grind to a pulp under his heel. At this point, her mother intervened.

" 'Please don't lose your temper, Sam,' she clucked like an hysterical hen. "He's not a delivery boy, after all, he must be the young man who got the wrong number! He was calling another girl named Elaine, and it was such a good excuse to get acquainted—'

" 'You got a funny way of getting acquainted,' Sam Kincaid said to me, 'Just what were you intending to do upstairs? Get in bed with my daughter?'

"Well, I wasn't going to let him bluff me. 'As a matter of fact,' I said coolly, 'That is exactly

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what I intend to do, and you can't stop me.'

"It was the wrong answer. Elaine's mother gasped. Her father released my collar, carefully removed my glasses with his left hand, and delivered a short right to the jaw. Fortunately he pulled his punch. He was just giving me the free sample. If he'd put his weight behind it, I would have gone down for the count. As it was, I merely staggered, grabbed the banister, and managed to stay on my feet.

"When my jaw would move again, after a fashion, I mumbled, 'But—don't you know who I am?'

"'No,' Kincaid said. 'And I don't care to find out. I'll give you just thirty seconds to get out of here.' He handed back my glasses and stood there rubbing his knuckles, waiting for the thirty seconds to be up, so he could sock me again.

"I realized, finally, that it wasn't just an act, that he actually didn't recognize me. So I put my glasses on and left. He slammed the door behind me and as an afterthought, opened it again and threw my box of roses after me. They spilled all over the porch. But I vowed I would come back when he wasn't there.

"I am more determined than ever to see Elaine, because I feel she is the key to the whole thing. I was nothing before she came to me, now I am becoming nothing again. If I regain her, I can face the world again, a whole man. If not, I have a strange feeling that my disintegration will become complete.

"I am sure of only one thing, the thing we were sure of the moment we met, that I love Elaine and that she loves me. I will affirm that though I pass through the vanishing point. But the question is, will she remember me as her husband, even though her parents don't? Is love a strong enough force to penetrate this aura of anonymity that seems to envelop me?

"In search of the answer, I went to the house where I was born and brought up, though I was so confused, I hardly knew how I got there. I had run to my mother, just as I did when I was six and blood was flowing from a cut in my bare foot; I was terrified that all the blood would flow from my body and I would dry up and blow away. Now I sought the same binding of my hurts, the same assurance that I would not vanish.

"When my mother unlocked the door, I just stood there, waiting for her to recognize me. Instead, she said, 'I don't vant any,' and started to close the door in my face. Desperately I pushed against it, keeping it open, protesting, 'But mama, I'm not selling anything!'

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"'Always they're not selling anything,' she said. 'They only got something to give away. But to get it you got to subscribe to a magazine. I got no money for that.'

"I hollered at her, 'Mama! It's me—Evan. Your son!' and she answered, 'You should make an old woman sad. My son Joe, he got kilt in Korea.'

"'You're dreaming, mama!' I told her. 'I never went to war! I was four-F on account of my eyes.'"

"'Joe had good eyes,' she said, 'He was a strong, healthy man, just like his father. And you don't sell me something just because you call me mama. Everybody calls me mama. Go next door—they got plenty money.'

"'I was so shocked that I let her get the door shut. She was telling me that I had never existed, that she had borne a different son, who grew up to be the man I always wanted to be. At first I thought she was losing her mind because she has been too much alone, and still grieves over my father's death.

"Yet how could I prove she was wrong? It seemed that nobody else knew me, either, that whatever slight mark this non-entity has made in the world has been erased. I can't even produce a single printed story with my byline. Then, with a sense of relief, I recalled that I had excellent identification in my billfold, a negative photostat with the words, 'Must wear corrective lenses' in the corner, with my name, birth date, the color of my eyes and hair, my height and weight, with the letter 'M' in the square marked 'Sex' and the word 'yes' in the square marked 'Married.' My driver's license would prove everything about me! I swear I had it this morning when I got a ticket. But this afternoon, when I searched for it frantically, it had disappeared, just as my manuscript did—just as my job did.

"That's when I decided to come here. My mother isn't losing her mind—I am. I recognized your name in the classified, doctor, because Elaine's mother mentioned once that she knows you by reputation. I almost hope you tell me that I am mentally deranged. That's bad enough, but at least it's conceivable. It's better than being non-existent."

The young man sat up, swung his long legs over the side of the couch and planted his feet on the floor, waiting, with a strained expression, for the doctor's verdict.

"I shall have to ask you a few questions," the doctor said. "Please answer, even if they sound rather foolish. Who are you, where are you, what year is it, and who's President?"

"I'm Evan Essant, I'm in a psychiatrist's office in Los Angeles, it's nineteen sixty-one, and

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the President is Kennedy."

"As I thought, you're oriented in all three spheres," the doctor said. "Walk across the room, please."

The patient took a moment to react to this unexpected command, then complied.

"Now walk toward me," the doctor said, and as the patient was about to collide with the desk, he added, "That's fine. Now sit down and remove your glasses."

The doctor shone a small flashlight into the patient's eyes, then announced, "You don't show the physical symptoms of an active psychosis."

"I thought all a person had to do to get into the booby hatch was to give a doctor a recital like I just gave you," Evan remarked, "It's not that simple, is it?"

"No, it's not that simple," the doctor agreed. "You might be surprised to know how many people try to get into mental hospitals just to avoid facing their problems. Now, you say you used some rather violent language to your wife. Did you ever become physically violent, or attempt suicide?"

"Certainly not!" Evan said, "On the contrary, the very fact that I'm here seems to indicate that I'm trying to preserve myself, if possible."

"Exactly," the doctor said. "It also tends to indicate that you are not psychotic. If you were, you would be convinced that your interpretation of this series of rejections is a valid one, and you would not seek psychiatric help."

"I do need help," Evan said, "But what can you do in a situation like this?"

"I want you to take some medication and come back to see me again Tuesday," the doctor said, as he wrote a prescription. "But I am inclined to think your mother is the one who may need hospitalization."

"Will pills make people recognize me?" Evan asked, dubiously.

"They will relieve the tension, so you can evaluate this lack of recognition more clearly," the doctor replied. "Naturally, your mother's rejection of you, coming after these other traumatic events, affected you profoundly, and you projected it back onto other people. But once you can relax, you will realize that these other losses have a more reasonable explanation. Then you can begin doing something about them. Report your driver's license lost and get a duplicate. Register at an employment agency. And by all means, effect a reconciliation with your wife, regardless of her parents' objections. You may take that as the doctor's orders."

"I'll follow your orders on that if it's humanly possible," Evan said, "Even if I have to go back to their house after Kincaid is asleep with a ladder long enough

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to reach her window sill. But since you seem to have all the answers, doctor, maybe you can advise me what to do about some immediate practical problems."

"What problems, for instance?" the doctor asked.

"Money, for instance. I doubt I even have enough to get that prescription filled. On the way over here I stopped at one of the company stations for gas, and tried to cash a personal check. You can imagine my embarrassment when it faded out as if I'd written it in disappearing ink. Among other things, I've had nothing to eat today, and that makes me feel even more as if I were passing out of the picture. But I don't know whether to settle for a hamburger, or blow the bankroll on a steak dinner. Should I hurry up and spend what money I have in my pockets before it disappears, too, or should I make it last as long as possible?"

"Perhaps you could sell your car to tide you over until you get a job," the doctor suggested.

"I had a car when I came here," Evan agreed. "I've been trying to figure out why, and I think it's because the finance company has more money in it than I do. So far, only my personal possessions that are paid for in full have been disappearing. This suit, shirt, and shoes, were bought on a charge account, so I haven't been arrested for indecency yet. But I paid cash for my underwear, and it's gone. Likewise my socks."

He expended one of his long legs, pulled up the cuff of his trousers, and exposed a bare, bony ankle.

"That *is* a problem," the doctor admitted, as he stared at it.

"It may solve itself," Evan said. "My fellow-employees, my in-laws and my mother, could see me, though they didn't recognize me. But on the way over here, something new seems to have been added. I parked across the street, and walked over in a marked cross-walk. A big truck and several cars kept right on going through the pedestrian cross-walk, as if none of the drivers could see me. If I weren't fast on my feet, I'd be on a slab at the morgue, where my visibility or invisibility would be of academic interest only.

"Two people bumped into me on the sidewalk. The elevator operator closed the door in my face, though there was plenty of room for another passenger. The girl in your outer office paid no attention to me until I'd been standing in front of her desk for several seconds. My image seems to register if people look at me long enough, but not at a glance."

The doctor took off his pince-nez, polished them, perched them anew on the bridge of his nose, and stared through them intently.

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"Do you have trouble seeing me now?" Evan demanded, in alarm.

"Power of suggestion," the doctor said. "Now, suppose we get started? Just lie back and say whatever comes into your mind. But please speak louder. I can't hear you."

Realizing that all memory of the case had been abruptly erased from the doctor's memory, Evan was too stunned to reply. It would have done little good, in any event, for his voice, sounding normal to his own ears, was apparently muffled before it reached the listener as if there were an impalpable glass wall of increasing thickness between. Evan raised his hand before his eyes, and in unbelieving fascination, stared through it.

The doctor picked up a medical journal from his desk, glanced through its pages, then put it down, tilted his desk chair back and contemplated the ceiling. He wrinkled his high forehead, looking perplexed, as if trying to bring into focus some vague thought that lingered in the back of his mind. Finally, with a shrug, he dismissed the matter and pushed a button on his desk.

The door opened promptly and the receptionist entered. "Do you have a cylinder for me to type while you see your next patient?" she asked.

"What makes you think I was dictating?"

"I thought I heard your voice."

"You were mistaken. I seldom have a free hour, and I was catching up on the journals. Who's in the waiting room?"

"A Mrs. Kincaid brought her daughter, Elaine, age 23, but I'm not sure of the patient's last name. The mother insists it's Kincaid, but Elaine says she's been married. I guess that must be the girl's abberation, that she's married to somebody her mother doesn't even know. You certainly run into some strange things here!"

"Very interesting," the doctor said. "Send the mother in first and I'll get the facts from her while the young lady waits outside for a few moments."

A sudden, aggressive breeze stirred the papers on the desk, ruffling an unused case history card and prescription blank. Then it blew through the open door to the waiting room, ruffling the receptionist's hairdo in passing.

She raised her hand to re-arrange her bangs. "It's drafty in here," she complained as she left to carry out the doctor's orders.

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Brian W. Aldiss's "Hothouse" series, which ran in these pages last year, drew more mail than anything we've published in some time. The present story is in a very different mood . . . but is further proof of the freshness of Mr. Aldiss's concepts and execution. Incidentally, be wary of Mr. Aldiss this time —what may not seem to be entirely clear in the beginning finds its justification later on.

SHARDS

by Brian W. Aldiss

I

THE WAY OF TELLING THE TIME down here in Mudland was very ingenious. Double A had a row of sticks stuck in the mud in the blackness before his eyes. With his great spongy hands that sometimes would have nothing to do with him, he gripped the sticks one by one, counting as he went, sometimes in numbers, sometimes in such abstractions as lyre birds, rusty screws, pokers, or seaweed.

He would go on grimly, hand over fist against time, until the beastly old comfort of degradation fogged over his brain and he would forget what he was trying to do. The long liverish gouts of mental indigestion that were his thought processes would take over from his counting. And when later he came to think back to the moment when the takeover occurred, he would know that that had been the moment when it had been the present. Then he could guess how far ahead or behind of the present he was, and could give this factor a suitable name—though lately he had decided that all factors could be classified under the generic term Standard, and he named the present time Standard O'Clock.

Standard O'Clock he pictured as a big Irish guardsman with moustaches sweeping round the roseate blankness of his face. Every so often, say on pay day or on passing out parade, the Lance-Standard would chime, with pretty little cuckoos popping out of all orifices. As an additional touch of humour, Double A would make O'Clock's pendulum wag.

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By this genial ruse, he was slowly abolishing time, turning himself into the first professor of a benighted quantum. As yet the experiments were not entirely successful, for ever and anon his groping would communicate itself to his hands, and back they'd come to him, slithering through the mud, tame as you please. Sometimes he bit them; they tasted unpleasant; nor did they respond.

"You are intellect," he thought they said. "But we are the tools of intellect. Treat us well."

II

Another experiment concerned the darkness.

Even sprawling in the mud with his legs amputated unfortunately represented a compromise. Double A had to admit there was nothing final in his degradation, since he had begun to—no, nobody would force him to use the term "enjoy the mud", but on the other hand nobody could stop him using the term "ambivelling the finny claws (clause?)" with the understanding that in certain contexts it might be interpreted as synonymous with "enjoying the mud."

Anyhow, heretofore, and nutmeggaphonically, it remained to be continued that everywhere was compromise. The darkness compromised with itself and with him. The darkness was sweet and warm and wet.

When Double A realised that the darkness was not utter, that the abstraction utterness was beyond it, he became furious, drumming imaginary heels in the mud, urinating into it with some force and splendour, and calling loudly for dark glasses.

The dark glasses were a failure, for they became covered in mud, so that he could not see through them to observe whether or not the darkness increased. So They came and fitted him with a pair of ebony contact lenses, and with this splendid condescension on their part, Double A hoped he had at last reached a point of non-compromise.

Not so! He had eyelids that pressed on the lenses, drawing merry patterns on the night side of his eyeballs. Pattern and darkness cannot exist together, so again he was defeated by myopic little Lord Compromise, knee-high to a pin and stale as rats' whiskers, but still Big Reeking Lord of Creation. Well, he was not defeated yet. He had filled Application No. Six Oh Five Bark Oomph Eight Eight Tate Potato Ten in sticks and sandbars and the old presumption factor for the privilege of Person Double A, sir, late of the Standard O'Clock Regiment, sir, to undergo total partial and complete Amputation of Two Vermicularform Appendages in the possession of the aforesaid Double A and known henceforth as his Eyelids.

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Meanwhile until the application was accepted and the scalpels served, he tried his cruel experiments on the darkness.

He shouted, whispered, spoke, gave voice, uttered, named names, broke wind, cracked jokes, split infinitives, passed particles, and in short and in toto interminably talked, orated, chattered, chatted, and generally performed vocal circumbendibusses against the darkness.

Soon he had it cowering in a corner. It was less well equipped orally than Double A, and he let it know with a "Three wise manias came from the Yeast, causing ferment, and bringing with them gifts of gold and Frankenstein and murder" and other such decompositions of a literary-religio-medico-philisophico-nature.

So the powers of darkness had no powers against the powers of screech.

"Loot there be light!" boomed Double A: and there was blight. Through the thundering murk, packed tight with syllables, he could see the dim mudbound form of Gasm.

"Let there be night!" doomed Double A. But he was too late, had lost his chance, had carried his experiment beyond the pale. For in the pallor and the squalor, Gasm remained revolting *there,* whether invisible or visible. And his bareness in the thereness made a whereness tight as harness.

III

So began the true history of Mudland. It was now possible to have not only experiments, which belong to the old intellect arpeggio, but character conflict, which pings right out of the middle register of the jolly old emotion chasuble. Amoebas, editors, and lovers are elements in that vast orchestra of classifiable objects to whom or for whom character conflict is ambrosia.

Double A went carefully into the business of having a C.C. with Gasm. To begin with, of course, he did not know whether he himself had a C.: or, of course squared, since we are thinking scientifically, whether Gasm had a C. Without the first C., could there be the second? Could one have a C.-less C.?

Alas for scientific enquiry. During the o'clock sticks that passed while Double A was beating his way patiently through this thicket of thorny questions, jealousy crept up on him unawares.

Despite the shouting and the ebony contact lenses, with which the twin polarities of his counter-negotiations with the pseudo-dark were almost kept at near-maximum in the fairly brave semi-struggle against compromise, Gasm remained ingloriously visible, lolling in the muck no more than a measurable distance away.

Gasm's amputations were iden-

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tical with Double A's: to wit, the surgical removal under local anesthetic and two aspirin of that assemblage of ganglions, flesh, blood, bone, toenail, hair, and kneecap referred to hereafter as Legs. In this, no cause for jealousy existed. Indeed, They had been scrupulously democratic: one vote, one head; one head, two legs; two heads, four legs. Their surgeons were paragons of the old equality regimen. No cause for Double A's jealousy.

But. It was within his power to *imagine* that Gasm's amputations were other than they were. He could quite easily (and with practice he could perfectly easily) visualise Gasms as having had not two legs but one leg and one arm removed. And that amputation was more interesting than Double A's own amputation, or the fact that he had fins.

So the serpent came even to the muddy paradise of Mudland, writhing between the two bellowing bodies. C.C. became reality.

IV

Double A abandoned all the other experiments to concentrate on beating and catechising Gasm. Gradually Mudland lost its identity and was transformed into Beating and Catechising, or B & C. The new regimen was tiring for Double A, physically and especially mentally, since during the entire procedure he was compelled to ask himself why he should be doing what he was, rather than resting contentedly in the mud.

The catechism was stylised, ranging over several topics and octaves as Double A yelled the questions and Gasm screamed the answers.

"What is your name?"

"My name is Gasm."

"Name some of the other names you might have been called instead."

"I might have been called Plus or Shob or Fred or Droo or Pennyfeather or Harm."

"And by what strange inheritance does it come about that you house your consciousness among the interstices of lungs, arota, blood, corpuscles, follicles, sacroiliac, ribs and prebendary skull?"

"Because I would walk erect if I could walk erect among the glorious company of the Higher Vertebrates, who have grown from mere swamps, dinosaurs and dodos. Those that came before were dirty brates or shirty brates; but we are the vertebrates."

"What comes after us?"

"After us the deluge."

"How big is the deluge?"

"Deluge."

"How deep is the deluge?"

"Ai, deluge."

"How deluge is the deluge."

"Deluge, deluger, delugest."

"Conjugate and decline."

"I decline to conjugate."

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"Who was that dinosaur I dinna saw you with last night?"

"That was no knight. That was my dinner."

"And what comes after the vertebrates?"

"Nothing comes after the vertebrates because we are the highest form of civilization."

"Name the signs whereby the height of our civilization may be determined."

"The heights whereby the determination of our sign may be civilized are seven in number. The subjugation of the body. The resurrection of the skyscraper. The perpetuation of the species. The annihilation of the species. The glorification of the nates. The somnivolence of the conscience. The omniverousness of sex. The conclusion of the Hundred Year War. The condensation of milk. The conversation of muts. The confiscation of monks—"

"Stop, stop! Name next the basic concept upon which this civilization is based."

"The interests of producer and consumer are identical."

"What is the justification of war?"

"War is its own justification."

"What is the desire to feed on justice?"

"A manifestation of opsomania."

"Let us sing a sesquipedalian love-song in octogenerian voices."

At this point they humped themselves up in the mud and sang the following tuneless ditty:

"No constant factor in beauty is discernable.
Although the road that evolution treads is not returnable,
It has some curious twists in it, as every shape and size
And shade of female breast attestifies.
Pointed, conical, flat or sharp or bonical,
Pendulous or cumulus, pear-shaped, oval, tumulus,
Each one displays its beauty or depravity
In syncline, incline, outcropping or cavity.
Yet from Peru to Timbuctu
The bosom's lines are only signs
Of all the pectoral muscles' tussles
With a fairly constant factor, namely gravity."

They fell back into the mud, each lambasting his mate's nates.

V

Of course for a time it was difficult to be certain of everything or anything. The uncertainties became almost infinite, but among the most noteworthy of the number were the uncertainty as to whether the catechisings actually took place in any wider arena of reality than Double A's mind; the uncertainty as to whether the beatings took place in any wider

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arena of reality than Double A's mind; the uncertainty as to whether, if the beatings actually took place, they took place with sticks.

For it became increasingly obvious that neither Double A nor Gasm had hands with which to wield sticks. Yet on the other appendage, evidence existed tending to show that some sort of punishment had been undergone. Gasm no longer resembled a human. He had grown positively torpedo shaped. He possessed fins.

The idea of fins, Double A found to his surprise, was not a surprise to him. Fins had been uppermost in his mind for some while. Fins, indeed, induced in him a whole watery way of thinking; he was flooded with new surmises, while some of the old ones proved themselves a wash-out. The idea, for example, that he had ever worn dark glasses or ebony contact lenses . . . Absurd!

He groped for an explanation. Yes, he had suffered hallucinations. Yes, the whole progression of thought was unravelling and clarifying itself now. He had suffered from hallucinations. Something had been wrong in his mind. His optic centres had been off-centre. With something like clarity, he became able to map the area of disturbance.

It occurred to him that he might some time investigate this cell or tank in which he and Gasm were. Doors and windows had it none. Perhaps like him it had undergone some vast sea change.

Emitting a long liquid sigh, Double A ascended slowly off the floor. As he rose, he glanced upwards. Two drowned men floated on the ceiling, gazing down at him.

VI

Double A floated back to his former patch of mud only to find his hands gone. Nothing could have compensated him for the loss except the growth of a long strong tail.

His long strong tail induced him to make another experiment; no more nor less than the attempt to foster the illusion that the tail was real by pretending there was a portion of his brain capable of activating the tail. More easily done than thought. With no more than an imaginary flick of the imaginary appendage, he was sailing above Gasm on a controlled course, ducking under but on the whole successfully ignoring the two drownees.

From then on he called himself Doublay and had no more truck with time or hands or ghosts of hands and time. Though the mud was good, being above it was better, especially when Gasm could follow. They grew new talents—or did they find them?

Now the questions were no sooner asked than forgotten, for by

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a mutual miracle of understanding, Doublay and Gasm began to believe themselves to be fish.

And then they began to dream about hunting down the alien invaders.

VII

The main item in the laboratory was the great tank. It was sixty feet square and twenty feet high; it was half full of sea water. A metal catwalk with rails round it ran along the top edge of the tank; the balcony was reached by a metal stair. Both stair and catwalk were covered with deep rubber, and the men that walked there wore rubber shoes, to ensure maximum quiet.

The whole place was dimly lit.

Two men, whose names were Roberts and Collison, stood on the catwalk, looking through infra-red goggles down into the tank. Though they spoke almost in whispers, their voices nevertheless held a note of triumph.

"This time I think we have succeeded, Dr. Collison," the younger man was saying. "In the last forty-eight hours, both specimens have shown less lethargy and more awareness of their form and purpose."

Collison nodded.

"Their recovery has been remarkably fast, all things considered. The surgical techniques have been so many and so varied . . . Though I played a major part in the operations myself, I am still overcome by wonder to think that it has been possible to transfer at least half of a human brain into such a vastly different metabolic environment."

He gazed down at the two shadowy forms swimming round the tank.

Compassion moving him, he said, "Who knows what terrible traumas those two brave souls have had to undergo? What fantasies of amputation, of life, birth and death, of not knowing what species they were."

Sensing his mood, Roberts said briskly, "They're over it now. It's obvious they can communicate. The underwater mikes pick up their language. They've adjusted well. Now they're raring to go."

"Maybe, maybe. I still wonder if we had the right—"

Roberts gestured impatiently, guessing Collison spoke only to be reassured. He knew how proud the old man secretly was, and answered him in the perfunctory way he might have answered one of the newspaper men who would be round later.

"The security of the world demanded this drastic experiment. The alien ship 'landed' a year ago in the North Atlantic, off Bermuda. Our submarines have investigated its remains on the ocean bed. They have found proof that the ship landed where it did *under*

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control, and was only destroyed when the aliens left it.

"The aliens were fish people, aquatics. The ocean is their element, and undoubtedly they have been responsible for the floods extending along the American and European seaboards and inundating the West Indies. Undoubtedly the popular press is right to claim we are being defeated in an alien invasion."

"My dear Roberts, I don't doubt they're right, but—"

"There can be no buts, Dr. Collison. We've failed to make any contact with the aliens. They have eluded the most careful submarine probes. Nor is there any 'but' about their hostile intent. It seems more than likely that they have killed off all the eel family in some unimaginable slaughter under the Sargasso Sea. Before they upset our entire oceanic ecology, we must find them and gain the information about them without which they cannot be fought. Here are our spies, here in this tank. They have post-hypnotic training. In a couple more days, when they are fit, they can be released into the sea to go and get that information and return with it to us. There are no buts; only imperatives in this equation."

Slowly the two men descended the metal stairway, the giant tank on their left glistening with condensation.

"Yes, it's as you say," Collison agreed wearily. "I would so much like to know, though, the insane sensations passing through those shards of human brain embedded in fish bodies."

"Ethics don't enter into it," Roberts said firmly.

In the tank, in the twilight, the two giant tunnies swam restlessly back and forth, readying themselves for their mission.

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Tony, like Eloise, lived in a hotel . . . and right there any similarity between the two children comes to an end. In fact, right there any similarity between this delightful story and any other one you have ever read comes to an end—with the possible exception of GORILLA SUIT, *(F&SF, May, 1958). This last told of the problems of a talking gorilla who was unable to find employment. The author then lived in Rome, now lives in New York City, and is named John Shepley. We know no more about him than this (but mean to learn), and that he is a writer we are prepared to strain our gussets for in order to keep appearing in F&SF. But enough of this vain mumbling: to The Kit-Katt Klub! Enjoy, enjoy.*

THE KIT-KATT KLUB

by John Shepley

ALL AFTERNOON TONY WAITED in the hotel room for his mother. He did his arithmetic and spelling lessons, he read a comic book through twice, he looked up Florida in the geography book and wondered why it was pink and shaped like a cigar. For an hour he lay sprawled on the satin coverlet of her bed, re-arranging his collection of animal pictures; still she didn't come. There was something hard under the pillow; he lifted it—sure enough, it was a pint bottle of Scotch, half-empty. "Not one of the better brands, not even White Horse or Haig & Haig," Tony said to himself. "We must be running out of money again."

He searched the room, but it was the easiest game in the world. There was a bottle of whisky in the lower right-hand drawer of the dressing table, another hidden under folds of pink lingerie in a drawer of the bureau, still another tucked away behind hatboxes on a shelf of the closet. "She's getting careless," he thought, "or else she really doesn't know how to hide things." At seven o'clock he debated whether to wash his face, agreed with him-

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self not to, put on his jacket and went down to the lobby. On the way, he asked the elevator boy if he had seen her, but the elevator boy hadn't.

The lobby was pink and silver, with big mirrors, soft rugs, armchairs, and a paper palm tree. Tony went up to the desk and asked the clerk. But the clerk obviously didn't like small serious boys who asked stupid questions —he gave a chilly smile and said he hadn't the faintest idea where Tony's mother was. Tony went into the cocktail lounge, where the bartender, the one called Mike, was a friend of his.

Mike was on duty, but busy; Tony climbed up on a barstool and waited. The cocktail lounge was more mirrors, pink draperies, green leather; over the bar was a long painting of a lot of naked people chasing each other. At one of the circular glass tables was a noisy party, three men with cigars and tuxedos, and three women. The men were drunk and ugly, the women drunk and silly. One had little blue stars in her hair like Christmas tinsel; one had freckles on her back; the third, a plump giggling blonde, had neglected, Tony noticed, to shave her armpits. He turned away from them—none of them was his mother.

Mike was mixing them martinis. "Have you seen my mother?" Tony asked.

"No."

"Let me have a ginger-ale."

Mike set aside the shaker, poured out a glass of ginger-ale and handed it across the bar. "But you better get out of here. You know where to take it."

"I know. I wish I weren't a minor, Mike."

"So I wish I weren't no bartender," said Mike as the six people began chanting in chorus for their next round. "Yessir, ladies and gentlemen, coming right up!" He waved the cocktail shaker high in the air and winked downwards at Tony. "Go on, kid, beat it."

Carrying his glass, Tony slipped behind the bar and through the door that led to a labyrinth of dark, damp passageways. He knew the way perfectly. One turn to the right and two to the left, straight ahead, then right again, and he came to a dirty little alcove with a leaking toilet, a row of steel lockers and a wooden bench, for the waiters, bartenders and bellhops of the hotel. He sat on the bench and drank his ginger-ale.

Then he decided to go up and have dinner. Even the dining room was pink, except for its white tablecloths and the black coats of its waiters. A waiter brought him a telephone book so he could sit high enough to the table—Tony was counting all the pink things there were in the

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world: lingerie, strawberry ice-cream, the map of Florida, paintings of naked people . . . "Well?" the waiter demanded, pad and pencil poised. "Shrimp cocktail . . ."—but no, that was pink, too. He ordered chilled grapefruit instead, filet mignon with no vegetables, and chocolate ice-cream.

He charged the bill to his mother's account, and out of his own pocket tipped the waiter three cents. He asked the waiter if he had seen her, though he knew what the answer would be. He sat for half an hour in the lobby looking at picture magazines, then decided to try the cocktail lounge again. Mike was yawning behind the bar and all the tables were empty, except one where a beautiful lady with greying hair and tired eyes sat by herself, drinking an old-fashioned and scratching futilely at a box of matches. She was Tony's mother.

He sat down with her, took the matches from her hand and lit her cigarette. "Who is it?" she said in a slurred voice.

"It's Tony."

"Oh—Tony—?" She reached out an unsteady hand to smooth his hair. "Do you want the cherry from Mother's drink?"

He ate the cherry and the orange slice—it was a ritual. He said, "It's time to go to bed, I think," though he knew she would want another old-fashioned. Mike served it and Tony again helped himself to the fruit—or the "garbage," as it was called in the parlance of bartenders. "Put it on the bill, Mike," he said, and Mike winked as always and saluted like a soldier. Tony's mother was powdering her nose, but she had trouble holding her compact and spilled powder on the table. Tony held it for her.

Crossing the lobby, she steadied herself on his shoulder. Once she stumbled and lost a shoe—Tony retrieved it, while the desk-clerk watched aloofly. The elevator boy kept his face averted as he took them upstairs, but Tony saw his shoulders quiver and knew he was laughing.

In the room, she kicked off both shoes and sat down on the bed. Tony went into the bathroom and soaked a towel under the faucet, brought it to her and stood watching as she wiped her face and neck. Her dress was unhooked at the sides, her skirt above her knees; she felt under the pillow and found the bottle. "Mother's just going to have one tiny sip," she announced, "because Mother's so very very tired." Then, as he still stood and watched, "Oh, for God's sake, go to bed!"

"Goodnight," said Tony, and kissed her obediently.

His room was connected to hers by the bathroom. He wondered how much longer they

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would be able to afford one or two rooms in this pink and silver hotel. It had been an evening like any other; vaguely, insistently, he knew it was all his own fault. He wished for once he could do something about it.

So when the crack of light disappeared under the bathroom door, he tiptoed outside. The corridors were full of people, some going to their own rooms, some looking for other people's rooms, waiters hurrying with trays of ice, soda and whisky. He walked to the back stairs. At the door of one of the rooms, a couple in evening clothes, a man with a red, perspiring face, and a chalk-white girl, were kissing and giggling as they tried to fit the key into the lock. Tony ignored them. On each landing of the stairs, he paused to listen, but no one came to stop him. When he reached the bottom, he knew he was free.

The back of the hotel was different from the front. The front opened on an avenue with trees and expensive shops, had a neon sign and floodlights, a canopy, noiseless glass doors and a doorman in a uniform. The back had an iron door that creaked on rusted hinges and it opened on an expanse of dirty concrete where there were hundreds of garbage cans full of orange peels and empty bottles. There was just enough space between the cans for Tony to walk, and just enough light from a flickering street lamp for him to see his way; he walked and walked and finally came to the edge of the concrete, where two sullen workmen in overalls were loading the garbage cans into a truck. He stood watching for a moment, as the truck drove away and another took its place. The men went on loading.

Tony walked on. It was a part of the city unfamiliar to him, a slum of soot-covered tenements with broken windows and rusted fire-escapes, but free and inspired, he knew the way. One turn to the right and two to the left, straight ahead, then right again, and he found what he was looking for: a little bar on a sidestreet. Three steps led down to a doorway with a fly-spotted electric bulb; with difficulty, Tony spelled out the wooden sign:

KIT-KATT KLUB

It looked disreputable, evil—it was exactly the sort of place he wanted.

He opened the door and went in. The ceiling was low, the lighting bad, there was a smell of stale beer. There were no mirrors, no shiny leather, nothing that was pink—everything indeed was the same dirty brown, the walls, the bar, the wooden tables stained with rings of liquor and scarred with cigarette burns. But the display of bottles behind the bar was as lucent as anywhere: ice-blue

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gin, pale vermouth, whisky, crème de menthe, and many others that even Tony didn't know the names of, all crystalline, clear and potent. There was no picture over the bar, only a sign in black letters: *No Minors Allowed.* Tony sat down at a table.

He was very pleased to be here. He recognized Mrs. Kit-Katt at once—grey with tabby stripes, she was crouching behind the cash register and licking her paws. Her eyes narrowed to complacent slits, she gave him only a glance, but the bartender, a bedraggled blue and orange parrot, looked over at him in a friendly, inquiring way. Tony noted with interest that he was half-blind, his left eye glazed with an opaque white film—then quickly the bartender turned his head, winking nervously with his single good eye, as a sooty grey pigeon fluttered over to the table. Tony ordered an old-fashioned and waited while the parrot, with shambling slowness, mixed it, and the pigeon brought it to him.

"You pay now," said the pigeon. "We don't allow nobody to charge things, we don't give credit, we don't let people run up big bills."

"How much?" Tony asked.

"Twelve cents."

Tony reached in his pocket and brought out a handful of pennies. "Your drinks are awfully expensive," he said, counting out twelve.

"Listen, you—you don't like our prices, you can go someplace else,"—and Mrs. Kit-Katt, from behind her cash register, echoed in a malevolent hiss: "Tell him to go someplace else." Tony handed over the twelve cents, with an extra penny as a tip, and the waiter, seemingly mollified, fluttering and cooing, carried it off to the proprietress, who rang it up on the cash register and resumed licking her paws.

Surreptitiously Tony poured the whisky on the floor and began to eat the cherry and the orange slice, as he gazed around at the other customers . . . there were only three. At another table sat two mangy-looking monkeys, drinking beer and with a chessboard between them; while one deliberated over his move, the other leaned forward and with quick busy fingers picked lice from his opponent's head. And in the shadows of the darkest corner sat an aged turtle. His shell was encrusted with dirt and cobwebs; his eyes were tiny and dull, heavily lidded and surrounded by scaly creases. From time to time, slowly, ponderously, he opened his blunt beak, then snapped it silently shut. He had a glass of greenish liquid before him which he scarcely touched.

Tony finished his old-fashioned and ordered another. His first flush of pleasure had passed, leaving him settled and gloomy.

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There was hardly a sound, only once in a while a click when one of the monkeys moved a chess-piece or cracked a louse between his teeth, now and again a tinkle of ice and glass, the infrequent ringing of the cash register, the flutter of a parrot or pigeon feather. The stillness was getting on his nerves—it was not a very interesting bar after all. Free as he was, nothing was happening; yet he knew he had no desire to go away. He wished that something would happen. Then the door opened and a new customer came in.

A jaunty new customer, a white fox-terrier, with black ears and muzzle as though he wore a mask, and he pranced on his hind legs up to the bar and announced in a shrill voice, "I'll have a martini, if you please." Mrs. Kit-Katt's hackles rose, her eyes dilated and flashed, but she held her ground behind the cash register; the parrot, turning one flat, questioning eye on the newcomer, uttered a little squawk of assent and began mixing the martini. The monkeys looked up once and went on with their game, the turtle made no sign at all, as the fox-terrier with a supercilious gaze surveyed the bar-room. The ribbon around his neck was bright pink.

Suddenly he was standing on all fours at Tony's table. "Mind if I join you?" Tony hesitated—he was really in no mood to talk to anyone—but the fox-terrier's tone was insistent, and he even sat down without waiting for an answer. "Why so sad tonight?"

"I'm not sad. I like it here."

"Do you really?" There was a note of commiseration in the fox-terrier's voice, and not a little pitying condescension. "I think it's rather a dump myself."

"Then why do you come here?"

"I don't if I can help it. I like something more high-class . . . well, what do *you* want?"—this to the pigeon, who was standing there expectantly.

"You ain't paid for your drink."

"So I haven't—how absent-minded of me! Be a good fellow and put it on my account, will you?"

"You ain't got no account. Nobody's got an account here."

"See what I mean about this place?" said the fox-terrier to Tony. Then to the waiter, "The embarrassing truth is, chum, that I seem to have come out tonight without any money. But I'm sure my old friend Mrs. Kit-Katt will vouch—"

"Tell them to pay or get out!" shrilled the proprietress, so loudly that the parrot, frightened, flapped his shabby wings, while the monkeys, disturbed at their game, pounded their fists on the table and cast disapproving glances at Tony and the fox-terrier. Even the turtle seemed agitated—he stretched his neck

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towards them, opening and closing his beak twice.

"—vouch for me," continued the fox-terrier imperturbably. "Or else—perhaps—" And he gazed winningly at Tony.

"Oh, I'll buy you a drink," Tony offered. "How much? Twelve cents again?"

"Martinis are fifteen," said the waiter nastily.

Tony counted out fifteen pennies and tipped him an extra one. The waiter took it and fluttered away; Mrs. Kit-Katt smugly rang up the amount. Indignation subsided—the monkeys resumed their chess-game and louse-hunting, the turtle retracted his neck, the parrot looked only abashed.

"That was very kind of you," said the fox-terrier, but his tone continued insolent. "Did I notice you tipping him? I wouldn't bother to tip such creatures, not in a cheap joint like this. The service is dreadful anyway."

"But we always leave big tips, wherever we go," Tony explained. "Even when we can't pay our bills, we always leave big tips."

"An interesting way of life, I wish *I* could afford it. But my manager is a beast and keeps me on a very small allowance."

"Your manager?"

"I work in the theater—I should think you'd have realized it by this time. By the way, you wouldn't have a cigarette?"

"I'm a minor—I don't smoke," Tony apologized, but he reached in his pocket anyway and was reassured to find that he had both cigarettes and matches. It was turning out to be an interesting evening after all. "What do you do in the theater?" he asked, extending a lighted match across the table.

"What does *anyone* in the theater do? I jump through hoops, I balance rubber balls on my nose, I dance on my hind legs—all that kind of stuff. I come from a distinguished line of theatrical dogs. My grandfather, if you'd like to know, was an international celebrity—he played before the King of Hungary and all sorts of important people like that. Maybe you've heard of the great Krakowski Circus?"

"I read about it just the other day!" said Tony, happy to show himself informed.

"Well, that was my grandfather's circus, that is until Krakowski came over to Brooklyn and went broke. As you know, he was an alcoholic—I mean Krakowski, not my grandfather."

"No, I didn't know *that*," Tony admitted sadly.

"He died of the d.t.'s, and served him right!" the fox-terrier declared indignantly. "Selling his whole troupe of performing dogs, one by one, including my grandfather, to keep himself in cheap schnapps! I call it worse than ir-

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responsible, I call it criminal! Uh —by the way—" his eyes brightened—"I see your glass is empty, and so, it seems, is mine. Shall we have another?"

"I don't know . . . I don't think I really . . ." Tony faltered.

"I'll of course repay your generosity sometime," his companion promised. "Mind if I help myself to another cigarette?—thanks. *Another round!*" he barked out at Mrs. Kit-Katt. Tony saw her eyes dilate and glow, her lips curl upward in a silent snarl, but she sent the waiter fluttering over to the table with another martini and old-fashioned. The monkeys chattered in annoyance, the bartender watched with one woeful eye, as again Tony counted out the money.

"I think we're disturbing everybody," he said uneasily. "And Mrs. Kit-Katt sure doesn't like us at all."

"Her tough luck!" said the fox-terrier. "We drink her lousy liquor and we pay for it, don't we? I've known her for a long time, and let me tell you, she'll do anything for money. Personally, I think she's a—why, *what are you doing?*" he demanded, horrified, as Tony began pouring out his whisky.

"Oh, I'm a minor. I'm not supposed to drink."

"But that's no reason to pour it on the floor! Here—" and he snatched the glass from Tony's hand and gulped it down himself. "It's a *sin* to waste it," he said, hiccoughing. "So you only eat the garbage, eh?"

"You shouldn't mix whisky with gin," Tony warned him.

"Superstition, my friend—where was I? Oh yes, I was giving you the lowdown on Mrs. Kit-Katt. She's a—well, let's say a menace, they're *both* a menace, she and her friend over there, that turtle. You may think you know Mrs. Kit-Katt and the others, but the turtle is something you can't explain. He's been sitting in that same corner for years, getting dirtier by the minute with dust and cobwebs, and drinking slime. Don't look now but he's watching us, he's opening his mouth, stretching his neck right in our direction—he knows we're talking about him. He knows everything, but nobody knows anything about *him*. There are only rumors, that he's the real owner of the place and Mrs. Kit-Katt herself only a front, a disguise—"

"A disguise for what?" Tony cried anxiously.

The fox-terrier looked suddenly coy. "Some sort of crooked business, I suppose, the usual thing. I'd rather talk about my grandfather. He was a celebrated circus dog, you see—he worked for Krakowski—"

"You already told me that," said Tony impatiently.

"But did I tell you about his comedown? For it was a come-

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down, you'll admit, from the great Krakowski and the King of Hungary to a vaudeville theater in Newark, New Jersey. You're familiar with Newark, New Jersey?"

"Sure I am, we lived there for a while. One of my stepfathers was a lawyer or something there."

"Then you no doubt know the Gaiety Theater?"

"I've walked past it lots of times. It had big pink pictures of naked women outside. Tell me more about Mrs. Kit-Katt . . . and the turtle. Please"

"And *inside* in the flesh. I believe they took their clothes off to music—it was the main attraction. My poor grandfather, who could balance a plate sideways on his nose while hopping about on one hind leg to the tune of Liszt's Hungarian Rhapsody, was only a boring interlude so far as *that* audience was concerned. He couldn't take it for long. It's my theory that he died of wounded pride—yes, wounded pride and a broken heart. Ah, your glass is empty again. Tell you what, I'll play you for the next round."

"But you don't have any money," said Tony, trying to control his irritation. "Even if I win, I'll have to pay."

"True, but this makes it more sportsmanlike. Waiter!" he barked, waving both front paws. "Dice!"

The pigeon brought the dice and they rolled them, everyone in the bar-room watching disapprovingly. Tony lost and paid.

"My father carried on the family tradition bravely," the fox-terrier resumed, sipping in turn his martini and Tony's old-fashioned. "Naturally he turned his tail on my grandfather's milieu, scratching up dirt on the whole business, the Krakowskis, the Kings of Hungary, not to mention the Gaiety Theater in Newark, New Jersey. My father, you see, had an arrogant manner, there was something sarcastic and unpleasant about him, but I don't doubt for a minute that he was a very great artist. Intuitive too: he had a gift for determining the direction of the wind and pointed his nose westward to the movie industry. It wasn't easy, it took great discipline for him to learn to look soulful and melting, as they'd expected of him in the first place. They beat him and kicked him and wheedled him, and finally he got his one big role: he played Rexie in *Rexie, Come Home,* all in Technicolor and Cinemascope, with Stereophonic barking and whining—"

"But I've seen it, I've seen it!" Tony cried. "It's all about a little boy who loses his dog, and at the end they find each other again! It's the most beautiful picture I've ever seen in my whole life!"

"Yes, two hours of agony, but I must admit it was a triumph for my father. For weeks he got more fan-letters than any other actor.

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They gave him a gold and silver collar, his own swimming pool and a pink plastic kennel. But he took to despondency, strange fits, foaming at the mouth. He bit an actress and they shot him. He has a marble tomb now, at which crowds gather—but why am I telling you this? You know all about it, you had a stepfather or something in Hollywood. But who's your *father?*" he demanded.

Tony tried to state it as simply as possible. "My father was one of my mother's husbands. I don't remember which one."

The fox-terrier's eyes went shifty, with a sly little look of satisfaction. "That's smart of you," he said, "considering the facts. Consider the fact that with me the family is finished. Oh, I've played various places, Chicago, Vegas, Miami and so forth, but you've been in those hotels and you know how they are—" Tony nodded sympathetically; the fox-terrier went on: "—all pink, and liquor has ruined me. It's too bad because I'm a brilliant artist. Look what I've come to, scrounging drinks from strangers in a cheap dive like this. That Mrs. Kit-Katt, so-called, is a menace, I've said it once, I'll say it again, a menace and a disguise, she and her friend over there, that turtle who keeps looking at us and knows everything. Doesn't this interest you now, what I'm telling you? You were begging me to tell you and now you don't want to listen! Pay attention—it shows what a crooked business the world is and how little we can do about it, it shows what I'm reduced to. Because it's all a crooked business with its parrots and pigeons, all a disguise, a disguise for sorrow, a disguise for life. Even the monkeys, they're part of it, but a silly part, I say. They come here every night, but they're only interested in their chess and their beer and picking each other's lice—I don't call it life, I don't call it sorrow, I call it a very stupid sort of existence, don't you? For why should we come to such places but for sorrow, for shame, because life is too big, too complicated for us, because our hearts are broken and our pride wounded? Let me tell you something: I come from a brilliant family! My grandfather was an international celebrity and he worked for the great Krakowski and the King of Hungary, and my father was the toast of the nation and received more letters than anyone else, and when he died foaming at the mouth they worshipped at his tomb, and I'm a brilliant creature myself and even though I've come to this, I still have my pride and my broken heart and the memory of a glorious past. We had our little family scandals, of course, but we carried them off with elegance and manners—we never ate garbage, or drank ginger-ale

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in toilets . . . we never made ourselves ridiculous in cocktail lounges or the lobbies of hotels . . . no desk-clerk ever had a chance to insult us, no elevator boy ever laughed . . ." He was gazing across at Tony with limpid, self-pitying eyes; the pink bow on his neck had come undone. "Another drink," he insisted tearfully.

But this time Tony refused, not only because he had spent all his money, but because now he had realized that *all* drunks were boring. And anyway at that moment there was a stampede of heavy feet at the door, and into the barroom burst a squad of policemen. *"It's a raid!"* barked the fox-terrier —the shock seemed to sober him. *"Run!"* Together they ran to the back window—Tony reached out to raise the sash, but the fox-terrier, yapping with terror, shoved him out of the way and leapt, crashed through the glass, and vanished up an alleyway into darkness, trailing his ribbon. Tony, rubbing a bruised knee, crouched under a table as one of the policemen, his terrible mustache black as shoe polish, stepped up to the cash register. "Mrs. Kit-Katt!" he thundered, pointing his club at her, "I hereby arrest you for serving minors in your bar! I hereby arrest everybody!" Tony watched from his hiding-place as handcuffs were clamped on the proprietress; snarling and spitting with rage, she was led outside to the wagon. The bartender shuffled out mournfully between two policemen, twisting his head from side to side in a vain effort to conceal his blind eye. The dirty old turtle refused to budge—he closed his beak with a vicious snap and retreated, head, legs and tail, into his shell—but two policemen hoisted him up bodily and carried him outside. The monkeys were handcuffed together and led away; the waiter went sulkily, ruffling his feathers. Tony followed them all out to the sidewalk, and stood watching while the wagon was loaded and locked and driven away.

Again he was free. But it was almost dawn, the streets had a lucid, unfriendly chill, and there was really no place to go except back to the hotel. He found his way easily. The two workmen were still loading garbage cans into trucks—they had taken away perhaps half, but the number remaining seemed always the same. He climbed up the back stairs. In the corridor, the drunken couple was still trying to unlock the door, the man crimson and frantic, the chalk-white girl exhausted, leaning impassively against the wall. Tony tiptoed into his own room, undressed and got into bed.

The crack of light was under the bathroom door. "And they would have arrested me, too," he thought guiltily, "if only I'd told them who I was."

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It took two people with a special talent to fly the ship . . . but the fact that they shared a talent did not render certain that they made an ideal couple.

TO LIFT A SHIP

by Kit Reed

IT WAS A SMALL, GREY, DRAB, relatively unimpressive hemisphere. Later it would be fitted for cargo, passengers. It would be enlarged and fountains would flow in mirrored lounges and cabins would nestle where the dome met the flooring, open and ready for intrigue. But it was all but empty now, and the lines of the dome rose above them, pure, unadorned.

The man and the woman sat on metal stools at the center, knees touching, hands resting lightly on a metal bar. There was no other machinery in the ship.

Better turn back now. He canted one hand.

They turned the hemisphere together, minds meshing, and Mary Lee's delight pushed the ship into an extra little skip.

Skimming soundlessly, avoiding highways and buildings, they went on into the cloudy morning.

They circled over the field where Zorn waited, loath to set down. Troubled by something in the air of the ship, Mary Lee let herself look up, into Ike's face, sensing some deep restlessness that intruded at the back of his mind. Shaking her head, she touched his thoughts and the two of them pulled the ship into a rising, swooping turn and circled the field once more, lost in flight.

It was not as joyful as their first flight. When they first lifted the ship together Mary Lee had faltered, at the brink of all joy, all understanding, afraid if she looked too closely at what was happening it would dissolve and she would lose everything. Then Ike's thoughts had swelled and surged past her in the sheer exuberance of flight. The hemisphere had leaped forward, and laughing, she had given herself to the rush of the ship. Now, even as her happiness in what they were doing grew, Ike pushed the ship farther, faster, and she

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found herself frightened, sure that his growing impatience threatened their control of the ship.

What's the matter? He lifted his eyes from the bar between them, annoyed.

Nothing.

Shrugging, he inclined his hand.

They set the ship down with a bump.

Zorn was clattering out of the transmitter shack as they landed. He bounded across the field to meet them, small and rugged in a hairy tweed coat.

"You went like a dream," he said. "Not a bobble. And I was sending out a helluva strong signal." He gestured at the tower that rose at the far side of the field. "You didn't hear me at all?"

Mary Lee shook her head, wondering why he thought anything could distract them.

"Hum?" Ike had thrust his hands in his pockets, preoccupied.

Zorn pressed him. "My transmission. I thought it might jam you."

"Oh, that." Ike waved his hand negligently. "Didn't hear a thing. I told you nothing bothers us."

At his shoulder, Mary Lee drew herself up proudly, acutely conscious of the way they looked, standing together in the grey morning.

"I've hired a commercial pilot who can keep his mouth shut," Zorn went on, making notes. "Tomorrow he'll circle you and we'll see if *that* slows you down."

"I told you," Ike said with a flash of irritation. "Nothing bothers us." He lifted his dark face. "We can fly anywhere."

"We have to know just what you can do," Zorn said patiently. "And we have to know a little of the *why*."

"Testing. Talking." Ike's face was clouded. "We've been coming out here for three months."

Zorn's voice was quiet. "And you've only been flying for one. Do you think I can show this ship to anybody until we have some idea what makes it work? Why it works for you and Mary Lee?"

"It works for us." Ike leaned forward a little.

"Now. But for how long?"

Mary Lee fell back, oppressed by the idea that they might not always be able to fly, that the flights might stop.

"It works for us," Ike said determinedly. "That's enough."

Zorn put a hand on his arm. "Then flying should be enough for you, for now."

"When nobody sees us?" Ike shook free, jaw thrust forward. "We can fly anywhere. Why in hell don't you let us?"

"We have to take our time," Zorn said. "We have to test."

"Test . . ." Ike growled.

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Mary Lee put up one gentle hand to stop him, but he was gone.

Zorn turned to her, eyes pleading. "Do you feel the same way?"

She shook her head, almost blinded by the memories of flight. "Flying's enough, Mr. Zorn. It's . . ." She lifted her hands expressively. Then, running them over her pale hair, she talked in a spurt, trying to explain. "He wants somebody to *see* us. He wants to make money. Mr. Zorn, I don't think he can *afford* . . ."

"Afford!" Zorn snorted. "My laboratory's pouring thousands into this project. Do you have enough money to live comfortably, Mary Lee?"

"Yessir. More than I ever made at the flower shop . . ."

"Well Ike is getting twice as much. He made next to nothing at that gas station. He can afford to come here every day. He can afford to take orders, too." He headed toward the shack where his equipment was stored. "Call him to come back here and help you put the ship away."

She sent out the call. Then she looked anxiously from Zorn to the edge of the field, wondering if there would be more hard words when Ike came.

Seeing her distress, Zorn spoke more gently. "We have to do things in their own time, Mary Lee. Every pirate in the world would be after you and that ship if we turned you loose now, and the people who weren't trying to buy or steal you would be trying to discredit you. We have to take our time." He touched her hand. "I'll get out of the way now, before Ike comes back. Try to calm him down, will you? Oh—and tomorrow—don't try to outrace that pilot I hired. There are some things I'll need to know."

By the time Ike came across the field to help her with the ship, Zorn was gone.

For a wild moment, when they touched the bar together, she thought they were going to take the ship and run with it, fly until there were just the two of them, the ship and the sky, but then Ike cleared his throat, jaw set in remembered rage, and they eased the little hemisphere into the low shed hidden at the edge of the field. After the ship came to rest Mary Lee sat for a few minutes, still touching the bar. When she shook herself to attention and left the ship, Ike was gone.

She killed the rest of that day in the park, in shops, in the movies, and the world outside seemed no more real than the black-and-white shadows that moved on the screen. She slipped through the streets like a ghost, marking time until the next morning, when she would be in the ship with Ike, and everything would seem real again.

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Her landlady nodded as she went by, ticking off one more boarder home from work. "Nice day, Miss Addison?" The voice ordered her to stop.

"Yes'm," Mary Lee said reluctantly, wishing she could escape the old woman and go inside.

"Come." The old woman was imperious. "Come sit down." She fixed her eyes on Mary Lee until the girl took a chair beside her on the creaking porch. She talked on and on about goings on in the neighborhood and Mary Lee tried to give the appearance of listening, but the yammering woman was no more than a shadow to her, moving shadowy lips. ". . . and he hasn't seen you in the flower shop for weeks."

"Um?" Mary Lee shifted uncomfortably.

"He likes you, you know. You two should—get together." The old woman shaped her hand suggestively. "By the way . . ." Her eyes narrowed, almost disappearing in greasy, wrinkled folds. ". . . If you haven't been at the shop, where *have* you been?"

May Lee gnawed at the inside of her mouth.

"I mean, a girl who isn't working regular . . ."

"Oh." May Lee got to her feet. "If that's what you're worried about." Zorn had paid her that morning. She fished in her pocket. "Here. Here's the rent."

She thrust the money at the old woman and fled into the house. A couple passed her on the stairs, quarreling, no more than a pair of chattering wraiths.

In her room things seemed even less substantial. Curtains flopped at the window, a grey film, and the sounds of the street flowed in and about her, never touching her. She moved from chair to table with no apparent plan, fluttering her hands over their surfaces, and even the furniture seemed indifferent to her. She moved on and on, trying to find something in the room that mattered, almost overcome by her isolation, sure for the moment that she herself was no more than a shadow, until finally, if only to prove her reality, she sent out the call. *Ike? You anywhere around?*

Zat you, baby? She could tell he was surprised.

Hi. Oh, Ike, hi. I just had to . . .

He cut her off. *Can't talk now. Got a date.* As if to soften it, *We'll really show them in the morning, won't we, baby?*

Her pride sang in the air. *We sure will.*

And she forgot his abruptness, and clung to that. She knew she gave his thoughts more meaning than she should, but she couldn't stop herself. And she felt somehow that their flights together underscored the meaning, that what they were doing pointed toward a future that, for her, couldn't help but be better.

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She stayed at the window for a long time, thinking about Ike. She remembered the first hostility, the suspicion. Ike, with arms crossed in a black tee shirt, black hair swept back, menacing. The look in his eyes that told her he had already dismissed her as a drab little girl, a nothing. And the sharp surprise when she found herself fully aware of his scorn. She had looked up, biting her knuckles, to see the glint break in his eyes as he realized that he was not alone with his thoughts. Bristling, they had faced each other.

Who are you? The question had no words.

And Zorn, still not sure they were different from the hundreds of others he had tried, had introduced the unlikely team—a cocky, swaggering boy who seemed little better than a thug and a plain, frightened girl, wondering why his processing staff had ever selected them.

By the time the weeks of testing were over they had reached some sort of brusque, businesslike truce, barely tolerating each other, each rigid for fear the other would slip past all barriers, into the unguarded mind.

Then there had been weeks in the field, trying to lift the ship.

Then there had been the first flight.

With it hostility became a memory. In the air they were a team, a man, quick and strong, with a profile like a blade, and a woman, sure and perceptive, now, unaccountably, almost beautiful. And for Mary Lee, at least, from that moment, there was nothing but Ike and the ship.

She left the window long after dark, not even hungry, and composed herself on the bed, clearing her mind, shutting out the room and the street and the drab expanse of the shabby neighborhood, waiting for morning.

"Morning, baby." Ike sprang over the grass, hair tumbled in the sunlight.

"Ike. Hi, Ike." She went to meet him, half-skipping.

The sun struck lights from the ship.

Above, a biplane was circling. Zorn was stationed at the edge of the field, adjusting a pair of expensive binoculars. He was expansive this morning, anxious to see what they could do, grinning. He had an assistant with him, who drew a drafting pencil over a series of graphs. At a signal, Mary Lee and Ike were to go into the ship.

They flew like angels. They dipped and swooped around the small plane, confounding the pilot, oblivious of the electronic device Zorn had planted in their ship, not even aware that the tower was beaming the strong signal Zorn had designed because if anything could, it would curb their flight. Ike shouted for joy, and

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then, before May Lee was fully aware of what he intended, he had brought the ship down hard on the tail of the biplane. Laughing, they chased it home, circling twice high above the airstrip before they turned back to Zorn's field.

Zorn was on the ground to meet them, furious. He turned on Ike. "You acted like a fool."

"You wanted to see what that plane would do to us." Ike slouched, grinning. "I showed you what we could do to the plane. Any plane."

"You went too near that airfield." Zorn shook his binoculars. "What if you were seen?"

Ike drew himself up. "What if we were? It's time somebody saw us."

"You know you're not ready."

"Who the hell says we're not ready. You're keeping us hidden like a couple of . . ." the word eluded him. He shrugged. "It's time people saw this thing. People with money. I didn't come into this for peanuts, and I'm not going to settle for peanuts just because you're scared." He jammed his face into Zorn's. "Scared."

"If you bring this thing out in the open you'll blow it for all of us." Zorn's face was set in anger.

"I know why you're afraid," Ike said. "Your contract's no good. You're afraid somebody will cut you out. If you keep us hidden, nobody can get to us to tell us what suckers we are."

"Tomorrow some people from the plant will be out for observation," Zorn said, dangerously quiet. He was making notes.

"We're suckers!" Ike swelled with rage.

"You and Mary Lee will be on the field at eight," Zorn said in level tones. He turned on his heel.

"You're afraid, Zorn, afraid," Ike roared.

Mary Lee shrank from his thoughts.

"Without us you're nothing, Zorn." Ike's voice seemed to fill the field. "That's why you're afraid."

May Lee stood at the edge of the field after Ike and Zorn had gone, too weak to move, awash in the waves of their anger.

Her landlady was lying in wait for her, like a fat spider.

"Man was here for you," the old lady said, licking her lips, "Sweetheart?"

"What . . ." Mary Lee forced the words. "What did he look like?"

"Like trouble, that's what he looked like. Dark hair, black shirt . . ." The old woman ran her thick tongue back and forth.

"Oh." Mary Lee could feel the blood leave her face. "I . . ."

"If that's the kind you're hanging around with . . . If that's the reason you're not working . . ." The old woman made an obscene gesture. Her face seemed filmed over with grease.

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"Stop!" Strangled, Mary Lee ran to her room.

She tried to shut out the woman, the house, in memories of the flight, but try as she could, she couldn't call them up. There was a sound on the stairs. Step, snuffle. Step, snuffle. The old woman was coming up, heading toward her room. She heard fingers fumbling at the door, heard her landlady's sharp, ugly bark. Just then Ike's call came into her mind, and she ran out the door, past the sweating old woman, and went without question into the streets. She didn't even hear the woman shouting after her.

He was at a small park, one of the last pretty places in the neighborhood, trembling with urgency.

Come on, baby, come on.

Where, Ike? Even before he touched her hand she knew she didn't care.

Hands still touching, moving in silence, they boarded a bus and rode to the field and the ship. Dazed, Mary Lee stood by while Ike did something to the guard and they were in the shed, at the door of the hemisphere, in the ship.

It lifted like black lightning, hurtling into the night, and they flew on without direction, faster than they had ever gone, eyes turned inward, on their own preoccupations, hearing dulled by the rush of wind against the hemisphere. Mary Lee lost herself in the plunge forward, the feeling of oneness with Ike, knowing that she had found in flight with him something she would never find at any other time, in any other place, in any other human being. She didn't care how far or fast they went, and she didn't care (for she had read it in his mind) that the ship was theirs now, not Zorn's, and they would never go back.

She was ready to fly on forever, until the ship disintegrated and the wind took them, until their power failed and they plummeted into the sea, because as long as they flew she was with Ike and he was with her, and she knew now that she was in love with him, and there was nothing outside herself but Ike, and the ship. She threw back her head as the ship went on and on, forgetting everything now but the immediacy of the flight, dreaming, until suddenly, in the half-light of the ship Ike lifted his eyes from the bar and looked at his watch, and she realized he had some plan.

It's time. And he put a direction into her head

They turned the ship together, and Mary Lee could make out in his mind the picture of a vast field, a geometric array of buildings, elaborate wires and towers and a knot of expensively dressed people on the ground, waiting for Ike. Soon she could sense the excitement of the watchers, and when she glanced at the viewport, she

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saw the field below them, and the knot of people. As they swooped low, one of the watchers waved a flag.

Let's show them.

Ike lifted one hand from the bar to touch her face, and then unfurled an intricate pattern of dips and turns, of rises and falls, and bending their minds together, they moved the ship into a parabola. She was uneasy now, because what they did seemed important to Ike only because there were powerful men watching from below. But in the next second she saw that his plan for the ship's motion was beautiful, and because she loved him she threw her heart into it.

Mary Lee could sense the excitement of the watchers, and Ike swelled with pride. Expanding in his strength and happiness, she helped him pull the ship into a wild dash for the ground, to hover, two feet above the field, to pull up suddenly in a free, headlong rush for the heavens.

Ike. Oh, Ike.

Pretty good, baby, pretty good. But the swoop and the dive seemed to mean little to him. He was intent on the men below.

Who are they, Ike? She was uneasy.

Never mind, baby. It's not important.

But it was, she could tell, and she fought back the feeling that there were other things for Ike, things more important than her and the ship.

Hey . . . His delight at their power rang in her head like a bell. *Let's show 'em what we can do.*

And they dipped and turned in a dizzying pattern and then slowed, to hover above the field.

The thoughts of the watchers crowded into the ship and Mary Lee shrank from them. The expensively dressed men couldn't believe what they had seen, couldn't wait to run their hands over the ship, to touch the fliers, to own both. Their minds were mirrors of greed.

Ike. She called him, with a sense of foreboding. *Let's go . . .*

He was distracted by the thoughts from below, and she couldn't reach him. There was the fragment of an answer. *After I fixed this up?*

A short command came from the signal tower. *Come down.*

No. Mary Lee clung to flight. Ike, let's get out of here.

Another fragment. . . . *ready to go into production.*

Come down. The signal intruded. *Come down.*

Ike, it's no good. She pushed a picture of endless skies into his mind.

We'll show 'em how it works, train new pilots . . . He was slipping away from her.

We don't need all that, Ike. The ship's all we need. She pleaded, eyes burning fiercely. *Ike?*

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Come down. The signal was imperious.

She tried to touch his mind but it was driving ahead now, closed to her. *Ike.* Nothing. *Ike, look.* And she laid her mind open, showing him everything—the love, the drive, the most secret things—and begged him to look into it, helpless, vulnerable in her appeal.

And in that second he swept the control away from her, nosed the ship down with such power and drive that she knew she and the ship had never been enough for Ike, and their time for flying together was ended.

She sat numbly in the ship while Ike, swaggering a little, went across the field to talk to the chairman of the board. He brought the man, encased in tweed, redolent of tobacco, into the hemisphere. He stood by politely as the industrialist sniffed at the unimpressive metal, the simple controls, Mary Lee.

Ike looked at her indifferently. "We could jazz up the inside a little bit," he said bluffly, waiting for the offer.

Finally, when the man touched the end of his cigar to the bar, knocking a thick ash on the floor, Ike grew tired of waiting, and spoke again.

"Well?"

"It looked pretty good up there." The man stepped on the soft ash. "But this . . ." He waved a hand around the control room. "Let me go along this time. Before I make an offer I want to be sure what you can do." One of his lackeys brought a camp stool and set it up at one edge of the hemisphere.

Wityout looking at Mary Lee, Ike settled himself at the bar.

Numbly, still blinded by love, Mary Lee bent her will to his. She put leaden fingers on the bar. She could still sense his tension as they strained together, trying to lift the ship. There was no sound but the throb of their bodies, the breath of the man on the camp stool. Both willing the ship to lift, they pushed again.

They worked together for several minutes, straining, trying, until finally, without looking at Ike, Mary Lee put her head down on the bar and wept.

The industrialist left the ship.

Maybe now. Ike was desperate, unbelieving.

And they tried once more.

Then, black with rage, he turned without another word for her and stamped outside, already framing the explanations he would make.

Broken, still sobbing, not even aware of what she was doing, Mary Lee lifted the ship blindly and started back to Zorn's field.

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To the folks in the Virginia foothills Hank Garvey was a fun-figure, up there on Hornblower Mountain. They didn't quite realize what it meant to come of stock so stubborn that a man would rather go through a stone wall than over or around it.

GARVEY'S GHOST

by Robert Arthur

THE BOY WENT CAUTIOUSLY down the path that wound along the slope of the hill, and the moon was dead above him. It filled the night with light, liquid and unreal, and peopled it with curious shadows. The silence was broken only by the boy's breathing, and sudden small sounds as animals broke cover ahead of him and scurried away into the protecting darkness.

The boy gripped his stick tightly and pushed through a tangle of wild honeysuckle to come out at the head of an open slope down which the moon-cast shadows tumbled in dark, irregular array. At the bottom of the slope was a larger blotch of shadow discernible as a ramshackle cabin, walls leaning and roof sagging.

He gave a little sigh of relief. He hadn't been afraid, exactly, but still the night was queer and the path strange, and he'd come a matter of an hour through the dark just to find this place, and old Hank Garvey, to ask him a question. A question about a ghost.

It was a queerish question to come asking on a summer night, but it was a queerish ghost, what he'd heard of it, and he wanted to hear more. His Uncle Radex, big and square-boned, had told him some, and his Aunt Susan more, quivering and shaking with the giggles.

But neither of them had made it very clear to him, maybe because they had laughed so much, so he'd come to ask Hank Garvey about it directly. It was Hank Garvey's ghost—not the ghost of Hank Garvey, that was, but the ghost that haunted Hank Garvey—so if anybody ought to know, he ought.

To learn about a ghost was an uneasy sort of errand for the nighttime, but he had an inquir-

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ing turn of mind. And though he was from the city, so that these Virginia foothills were new to him, he'd already become acquainted with the country and knew there was nothing to be fearful of, save getting lost, which he didn't intend to do. And besides, Uncle Radex' and Aunt Susan's mirth had been a challenge to prove he was man enough to do it.

So here he was, and at the bottom of the slope was Hank Garvey's tumbledown house, dark and silent. But faintly in the distance the boy thought he could catch the sound of a voice uplifted in cracked song. And straining his eyes, he made out two shadows far up the opposite slope—shadows that moved, a large one followed by a smaller one. The large one he decided was a horse, so the smaller must be Hank Garvey, plowing as Aunt Susan had predicted, and singing to himself as he turned the furrows by moonlight.

The boy hurried down the slope, passing the cabin, and clambered up the hill beyond, Hornblower's Hill. Near the top, in the middle of a level field, half turned, he found a plow. But Hank Garvey and his horse had vanished.

The boy paused for a moment, breathing hard. Then once more he heard Hank Garvey's voice, off to one side where the incline gentled to the top of the hill. And after a moment he caught sight of the man himself silhouetted against the sky and the moonlight—him and his horse.

Hank Garvey was sitting his horse backward, riding the stolid animal bareback, and the beast was carrying him to the hilltop. The man's legs were drawn up under him on the horse's broad rump, and alternately he was singing a tuneless song and blowing tuneless notes upon a mouth organ.

For a moment the boy stared. Then he followed. When he got to the crest he saw them again close at hand. The heavy animal walked stolidly in a circle, loose harness straps flying, with Hank Harvey squatted like a Turk upon his back, rolling a little to the stride and drawing an ecstatic tune out of his unreliable instrument. After a moment the boy hailed him hesitantly, and instantly Hank Garvey leaped down, peering toward the boy as if poised for flight.

"Who is it?" he called, voice shrill, as the boy approached.

"I'm Johnny, Radex Anson's nephew from the city," the boy called back, his confidence returning as he came closer. Hank Garvey waited for him, head half cocked, harmonica upraised. He was a little man, and his face was round, unlined, and very merry. Eyes round as quarters in the childish face gave him an elfin quality, and all the boy's strangeness was gone when Hank Garvey chuckled and answered him back.

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"Hello, Johnny, Radex Anson's nephew," he called. "I'm Hank Garvey. Did your Uncle Radex Anson send you, now, to buy a jug off me?"

The boy shook his head.

"I came for myself," he answered. "To ask about your ghost. If you don't mind, that is," he added quickly.

Hank Garvey chuckled. Behind him the old plough horse had stopped and was munching the long, lush grass.

"Well, Johnny Nephew from the city," the little man said, merriment in his voice, "it's a pert night and I'm feeling spry and I don't mind a little company. If you've come all this walk in the night to hear about my ghost I don't mind telling you. But ain't your Uncle Radex told you about it before this?"

"Some," the boy admitted. "But he always laughed when he told it. I never did get it straight because of the laughing, Mr. Garvey. And I sort of wanted to know, I guess."

Hank Garvey clapped his harmonica to his mouth and emitted a series of discordant notes, jumped in the air and clicked his heels twice, and did a grotesque pirouette as he came down.

"You sort of wanted to know about my ghost?" he asked, seeming vastly pleased. "Well, Johnny, it kind of seems to be dinner time and I've got a cold dinner hid under a rock here. Maybe you'll eat a bite with me while the moon looks over our shoulders?"

"Why—why yes," the boy said. "I'd like to, Mr. Garvey."

"And I'll tell you about my ghost," the little man promised, turning over a flat rock and getting a tin box from beneath it. Then from the crevice of a split boulder he drew out a jug. He grabbed the cork in his teeth and twisted it free. Then he spat out the cork, caught it deftly, raised the jug, and drank long and deep. When he had finished he lowered the jug, slapped the cork back into place, and drew a ragged sleeve across his mouth.

"Aha," he said, smacking his lips with great satisfaction. "Hank Garvey's own corn whiskey. And it's why the path across the hill is so easy to follow—because of Hank Garvey's corn whiskey."

He chuckled and squatted beside the rock, opened the tin box and handed half a ragged sandwich to the boy, who sat down upon a stone close by feeling well at ease. The little man wolfed the other half of the sandwich, eating with loudness and gusto, finishing the last crumb before the boy had hardly begun.

"Now I'll tell you about my ghost," he said, leaning forward and peering at the boy. "But you tell me first, Johnny from the city, what your Uncle Radex has told you about me."

"He says that you've got a ghost

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that haunts you, and that you sleep all day and only come out at night to do all the things other men do in the daytime."

"That's right," Hank Garvey chuckled. He was squatting on his heels and he teetered back and forth. "That's absolutely right. I've got a ghost that haunts me, and I sleep all day and work at night. Your Uncle Radex told the truth. I get up at six in the evening and I milk my cow and cook my breakfast and do the chores, and then I plow, if the season's right and there's moon enough—but only if there's moon enough.

"And I plow and I sow, and other times I make a little whiskey at a certain place down among the rocks, and sometimes somebody comes at night to buy and so I have some money in my pockets. And when that happens I don't plow and I don't sow, but instead I climb the hill to look at the moon, and maybe I dance and sing in the moonlight. And then maybe I go swimming in the duckpond, or just run—run up and down hills singing to myself because I like to. And then along about daybreak I go back home and milk my cow and cook my supper and I go to bed and I stay there snug and sound till it's six o'clock again. And everybody says I'm crazy. Did you ever hear the like of anybody living such a way, Johnny Nephew?"

"I never did," the boy told him, interested. "Is that why you're crazy, Mr. Garvey?"

"Of course not!" the little man protested indignantly, and looked at the boy with solemn injury in his eyes—or perhaps the moonlight only made it seem so. "Of course not. I do all that because I've got a ghost. Nobody could call me crazy for doing that because I've got a ghost. It's only because I've got a ghost that I'm crazy. You see, Johnny from the city?"

"Well, I don't know if I do or not," the boy answered, his high, pale brow wrinkling. "You mean it's because of your ghost that you sleep all day and work all night, when other men are sleeping?"

"That's right, Johnny, absolutely right," Hank Garvey said, bobbing his head. "It's the ghost of my granddaddy who came over from Ireland and was killed by his neighbors one day—but killed all by accident. Oh, yes indeed, by accident, for they never set out to do it."

As he talked he had finished off another pair of thick sandwiches, and now he munched a great, raw turnip.

"You see, Johnny Nephew," he said as he ate, "my granddaddy was a contrary man—a *very* contrary man. He didn't get along with anybody, and he didn't care to do what anybody else did. When other men chewed he smoked, and when they smoked he chewed. When they went to church

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he went fishing, and when they went fishing he went to church. Naturally he got talked about.

"But he was a very contrary man, was my granddaddy, and he paid no attention to what the neighbors whispered about him. He went his own way and enjoyed himself his own way and those who didn't like it didn't say so out loud—not to him they didn't.

"But then it happened my pa was kicked by a mule and died of it, and my mother died presently too, and it was along about that time my granddaddy decided that he'd rather work at night and sleep in the day, and he did.

"Now naturally that made him more talked about than ever, him already having the reputation for being a contrary man, and folks began to whisper he was more than that—they said he was crazy. He wasn't, of course—he just didn't care to do like other men did—but that's what they said. And of course he took no notice of it, but went right ahead plowing and milking and hoeing and fishing by moonlight and making me do the same.

"So pretty soon the talk became louder that I was a very little boy and shouldn't be allowed in the hands of a crazy granddaddy, but ought to be taken away because he might do me a damage. So one day the men got together and came over while he was asleep in order to take me away and get me brought up by somebody who wasn't crazy. And that was when they killed him. They didn't go for to do it, but he sort of forced it on them by waking up whiles they were taking me. So they killed him, before he'd done more than break the jaws of two of them, and the ribs of a third, and kick the eye out of another who fell down and got under his feet. Then they took me away and I was brought up by people who weren't crazy. And that was the last I ever heard of my granddaddy until ten years ago when he came back from wherever he'd been and began to haunt me. Have you followed all that, Radex Anson's nephew?"

"I guess I have," the boy told him, never taking his eyes off the round, merry face over which the little man's hair tumbled from time to time like a shock of ancient straw. "And then what happened, Mr. Garvey?"

"Well, Johnny, I had worked here and around as a farmer for maybe fifteen years, or maybe more, or maybe less, and never cared much for it. But I did it, and did everything everybody else did, though I could never figure much reason for it except that I remembered granddaddy and how the neighbors killed him all by accident. So I worked all day and slept all night and went to church Sundays and I voted Democratic too. And then, just when I was getting most awful tired of doing

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everything like everybody else did, my granddaddy's ghost came back and began haunting me. And then I didn't have any choice."

"You mean your granddaddy's ghost *made* you work nights and sleep daytimes, Mr. Garvey?" the boy asked, trying to be sure he understood.

"Bless me, yes," Hank Garvey said, and chuckled cheerfully. "I had to do it. It was forced on me. Everybody understood that when I told them about it."

"That's what I wanted to know," the boy confessed. "Just how it was your granddaddy's ghost made you give up working in the day and take to working in the night."

Hank Garvey stared at him, round eyes wide.

"Why, by haunting me, of course," he said. "I thought I told you that. The only way I can get away from his haunting is by working nights and sleeping days. I thought I told you that."

"Yes," the boy persisted, "but I mean, how did he haunt you? Did he come to you at night, all pale and misty, and keep you awake and talk to you, or did he walk across your room while you were sleeping and moan until you guessed what he wanted you to do, or what?"

Hank Garvey teetered back and forth on his heels several times and then fell over on his back in the grass, where he lay laughing softly for the better part of a minute. Then he sat up again and every trace of laughter was gone from his face.

"Bless me, no, Johnny Newphew," he said. "I told you my granddaddy was a very contrary man. Do you suppose he would have an ordinary ghost? Not my granddaddy! His ghost is just as contrary as he ever was. Do you know what he does, that ghost?"

Hank Garvey leaned forward, close to the boy, and dropped his tone to a confidential whisper.

"That ghost haunts me *daytimes!*"

"Daytimes!" the boy cried in astonishment.

Solemnly the little man nodded.

"Instead of being pale and misty white, like an ordinary ghost," he whispered, "this ghost of mine that used to be my granddaddy is black, like an inky shadow. And he haunts me by daylight. He used to dog my footsteps all day long, a hideous black shadow, lurking in corners, creeping along beside me, sitting across from me at the table, gliding along beside the plow, crouching beside me when I ate lunch. It made me feel pretty bad. How would *you* feel if you had a black ghost haunting you daytimes?" he cried at the boy suddenly.

"I don't know," the boy answered, eyes wide.

Hank Garvey leaped straight up in the air, clicked his heels, and came down on the balls of his feet.

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Nimbly he darted over to the split rock, drew forth the jug, twisted out the cork, spat it into his hand, raised the jug, and drank. Then he slapped the cork back into place, hid the jug, and raced over to vault to the back of the plow horse, startling the creature from its browsing.

"Well, it isn't a nice feeling," Hank Garvey said then, warmly, peering down into the boy's face as the boy got to his feet and stood close beside the horse, looking up. "An ordinary white ghost at night is bad enough, but a black ghost haunting you all day long is altogether different, and worse—much worse. That's how I knew it was my grandaddy—by its contrariness. And that's why I have to sleep all day and work all night. Because when I sleep daytimes he can't haunt me—*and at night I can't see him!*"

He gathered his heels up under him and beamed down at the boy.

"Now you understand about my ghost," he said. "So come again some night when the moon's up and we'll talk more. But don't come daytimes. Daytimes I'm snug in bed, sleeping sound."

He laughed and kicked his heels. The horse broke into a trot. Hank Garvey snatched out his harmonica and began to play, then they were gone over the crest of the hill, leaving the boy alone knee-deep in fresh smelling grass, with the moonlight pouring over everything and only the sound of the little man's music drifting back to him.

Vintage Wine

My vampire thirst,
learning more subtle tastes
than tang of blood,
sucks up fear's chilly pulsing.
My lips have reddened
with distillate of love
from a more secret source
than any in the breast.
I can forego
the currents of your body,
being more choicely tabled
at your soul.

DORIS PITKIN BUCK

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The novels and stories signed "Charles Henneberg" were actually written by Charles Henneberg zu Irmelshausen Wasungen and his wife, Nathalie, in collaboration. Henneberg, born in Germany in 1899, had an active and varied career. He and his wife met when he was a member of the French Foreign Legion stationed at Homs, Syria; she was a Russian journalist. After their marriage they spent four years in the Arabian desert, and during the war fought together under de Gaulle. He was subsequently appointed Directeur des Medaille's Militaires. *Henneberg died of a heart attack in March, 1959. His widow is carrying on the series of science-fantasy novels they had planned together, signing herself in his honor, "Nathalie Charles-Henneberg."—D.K.*

MOON FISHERS

by Charles Henneberg

(translated by Damon Knight)

"IT IS THE AIRLOCK OF A SPACE-ship," Professor Reszky told Hugh Page, test pilot for the Chronos group in the year 2500, who was looking with interest at the white cockpit equipped with luminous dials, of the machine standing in the middle of the Paratime Research Laboratory.

"You are correct. We chose that shape for particular psychological reasons. The man who gets in there will be surrounded by cosmic radiation—as much so as any astronaut who takes off into space. The fourth dimension will contract around him, the universe will become immobile. The traveler can get off at any stop—past, present or future. Only his body will remain in that cockpit."

"Then this trip will be a dream?"

"No. It's a real world on the other side, everything is real. Understand me, I'm not hiding anything from you: the dangers you'll meet are real dangers. The only difference is, if you should die, your corpse will be here."

"That's a consolation," said Page.

With his archangelic stature, his unruly black curls and his long violet eyes, Page looked like a prince out of some Persian miniature. All things considered, Reszky thought to himself, it was because of that strange look that he had chosen Page from the crowd of standardized heroes. In a gentler tone, he said, "The principle behind the trip moderates the risk."

"Because it will operate under new laws?"

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"Exactly. For about three centuries, in fact since the earliest hyperspace flights, mankind has been held back by an exasperating riddle. We know that time is a dimension, it expands and contracts according to its own laws; our spacemen come back young from distant galaxies, while the names of their parents have worn smooth on their tombstones. . . . But that path was closed to us, an invisible barrier stood in our way —worse than the monsters of the Odyssey, or those light and sound barriers that were broken by twentieth-century fliers. . . .

"That demanded an explanation. Some people gave out extravagant hypotheses, some insisted on the immutability of the past. Some amused themselves with brain-teasers: 'Suppose you should be so unfortunate, during a stopover in the past, as to kill your grandfather before he'd become a parent—would you exist? And if you didn't, how could you have killed him?' It's what is called the temporal paradox."

Page laughed, shortly: "As if anybody could be sure of his grandparents!"

"The uncertainty principle, of course!" Reszky wiped his fogged eyeglasses. . . . "But that was only a temporary setback. The answer was really terribly simple. Ever since Wells, apparently, the world had been hypnotizing itself with false ideas—we'd all had a material orientation to the problem. A machine, built of chrome and nickel, would move you up or down the Time Stream; you'd land in the middle of an era, bringing along your valise and briefcase, which would make for complications. Of course it was idiotic. We had to start all over again from the bottom."

"And where did we wind up?"

"At this fundamental idea, this egg of Columbus: *the time that acts on matter is external to it.* Our contact depends on extrasensory perception."

"In other words," Hugh said, "we're going to travel as disembodied spirits? Nobody will see or hear us, and we won't be able to interfere in anything that happens?"

"No," said the professor. He hesitated, looking very tired. "It always comes back to the Heisenberg principle, and Einsteinian relativity. Within certain limits, anything can happen. The present is built on an uncertain past, looking forward to a multiple and plastic future. Take the history of nations . . . Was Nero a misunderstood poet—a madman—or a complete monster? Was the first atomic bomb our doom, or our salvation? Each of these situations might be different, without changing the whole structure. Even the moment we're living in is nothing but a 'privileged configuration.' . . ."

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"In other words—excuse the unscientific expression—I might 'bump into the past or the future'?"

"All that is still theory," Reszky sighed. "The first time journey is the one you're about to make, remember? All the same, I don't want to give you any illusions: there are no watertight compartments any more. There are phenomena of levitation, you see. And people gifted with strong psi faculties. Prophets and clairvoyants—"

"There was even," put in an assistant archeologist drily, "a certain continent with a strange reputation—Atlantis. Plato spoke of it in the Critias and the Timaeus. It was also described, in a wealth of detail, by a certain Theopompus who lived some three hundred eighty-nine years before Christ."

"A fable!" the scientist protested.

"Or a 'privileged configuration'? You said it yourself—anything can happen!"

"Look," said Hugh in a conciliatory tone, "what use could these Atlanteans be to us, in the case at hand?"

"What use? I don't know. I rather imagine they might cause you to run one of those well-known risks that Professor Reszky treats so lightly."

The physicist turned pale. "Explain that!" he said. "I don't care for half-truths. Just how could these fellows interfere with a paratime voyage beginning in our own year, twenty-five hundred, when they lived over five thousand years before Christ, and the one thing we know about them for sure is that they went down with their continent?"

"Oh, it's only a hypothesis . . . As long as you were talking about prophets and other clairvoyants. They were blue, it seems."

"An extenuating circumstance," said Hugh gravely. "But so what?"

The archeologist seemed indignant that a layman should presume to argue with him. "It seems," he explained rapidly, "that they also had unusual psychic abilities. *'They dreamed of the past and remembered the future.'* That means that these 'moon fishers' traveled far beyond us in the Time Stream, capturing visions in their nets and hatching out events to come."

"An unverifiable statement," Reszky interrupted coldly. "Let me remind you that the Service concerns itself only with the *exact* sciences."

Her name was Neter.

She was born some three thousand years before Christ. The hieroglyph of her name signified: life and lotus, the primal ocean, mystery; the beginning of the world and its feminine principle . . . and a throng of corollaries: moonbeams like a net on the waves; and on the desert, where it is a mirage; all that troubles, beck-

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ons, stirs up change; the veil of Isis over the future—and over the past as well. In the Nile valley, this royal name, bestowed upon an ordinary girl, was astonishing.

Isides, her father, was one of a small group of blue men—refugees from a vanished continent which was sometimes called Mu, Gondwanaland or Lemuria, but most commonly Atlantis. These people were gentle and wise; their long life-spans awed the Egyptians, whose lives were short and swift. Some of them continued their migration, and carried their wisdom across the Red Sea. Isides, whom tradition credited with a span of nearly two hundred years, was venerated at Giza, where he founded the subterranean temple. Rumor gave him many wives—both goddesses and mortals (for in those days, the gods came easily down to Earth).

And one daughter: Neter.

We believe her mother was a Terran. Interplanetary cross-matings were hazardous then: thus was born ibis-headed Thoth, the baboon-faced Anubis, and Sekhmet with the body of a youth, surmounted by a lion's muzzle. Troubles by the thousand came from these births, not to mention Echidne and other sirens.

Neter, at fifteen, was beautiful and supple as a dancing serpent. Her whiteness was blue-tinged, as with all the Atlanteans: you can see her picture on a sarcophagus in the Valley of Kings, where she smiles beneath her tiara of sapphire. Necklaces of golden rose-leaves cover her long, flexible neck. The mouth is childish, sensitive and passionate, and her opal eyes languish under extraordinary lashes.

Now in those days, Egypt was throwing off an ancient oppression: the Hyksos invaders were being expelled, the Eighteenth Dynasty was mounting the throne, and the age of gold was about to open.

Not that the land was entirely free; dark terror reigned in the desert. The Interplanetarians were landing in these sands. They were of many kinds. Much later, the Pharaoh Psammetichus III noted: *"They fell from the sky like the fruits of a fig-tree that is shaken; they were the color of copper and sulphur, and some had three eyes. . . ."*

These were paratroops from a neighboring planet. But at the dawn of the Eighteenth Dynasty, others were landing in those many-eyed wheels of which the prophet Ezekiel speaks: they had a lion's body, wings, and a human face. Their leader was called Ptah. His statue—that of the Sphinx—burdened the plain.

Dark tales went about: these beings were ambitious to rule; lurking in the tomb-chambers of the Valley of Kings, they fed subtly on human sap—they drank the

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soul and not the blood. Multitudes of fellahs had confirmed these rumors by sight; but others put the blame on ghosts and spectres. Trembling, the land waited for the day when that power would make itself felt. There was much calculation of the time of the apocalypse, and its exact form.

Humanity was accustomed, already, to these random terrors, and these interminable eves of battle.

There came a night when the Atlantean Isides, in his cypress-girdled white house on the Nile, read a sign in the stars. He arose, rolled up his papyri in their cases, and went to the window beneath the archway: no, he had not been mistaken—a great trampling, a swell of hooting came from the desert, and above the wall of his house spiral antlers, sharp horns were outlined, as if a herd of antelopes, wild asses and sheep were hurrying onward, surrounded by adders and lizards: every creature that was mild, inoffensive, that shrank from death in the shadows, had taken flight.

Isides went in haste to awaken his daughter, and reassured her, gazing deep into Neter's clear pupils. Nonetheless, they got into a litter closed with curtains of Cretan "woven air," carried by four giant Nubians. The litter was swallowed up in the silent procession of animals; and along the banks of the Nile, three or four villages rose up and followed.

Neter had asked her father no questions; everything was understood between them. From time to time, parting the draperies, she put out her hand, which glowed in the darkness, and stroked a hind's velvet-soft muzzle. From the zenith, the moon cast her silver rays over the desert and seemed to draw to herself all Mizraim as her prey. Much later, when Thebes—all hanging gardens and alabaster towers—outlined itself on the pale horizon, Isides said: "Your uncle, Naphtali, the son of Jacob, is waiting for us."

That day, the fire from the desert consumed the oasis which surrounded the Atlantean's house, and the roaring of lions was heard in broad day.

Sunset found Neter sitting on a wall beside Deborah, the fourth wife of her uncle Naphtali, the two of them crunching melon seeds.

"Uncle" was only a title of friendship, for Isides, descended from the holy continent, had no blood relationship with the hard-working and prolific family of the shepherd Jacob. But, a poet at heart (for it is said: "Naphtali is a hind let loose: he giveth goodly words"), the Hebrew valued the Atlantean spirit, in its clarity and pride; he himself was very wise, even though deep in intrigues and married many times. His last wife, Deborah, was just Neter's age; they too were bound by friendship.

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Now Thebes was stirred by momentous happenings: the Pharaoh Ahmose was dead, and his son was away at war. A certain Apopi, working in the pay of the Hyksos, was preaching revolt: what had Egypt to do with a bellicose young prince who went off seeking conquest and emptying the granaries? Besides, nobody knew him, and his family was nothing but a tribe of the Delta . . . and similar nonsense. The dregs of the populace drank palm wine at his expense and shouted loudly. But towards noon, a panting quartermaster ran up, announcing a cloud of dust that heralded the coming of an innumerable army. Every heart missed a beat. "The Pharaoh!" He arrived, having crossed the Nile.

His name was Amenophis. At twenty, he was beautiful with a violent beauty; all the girls of Mizraim were in love with him Brought up far from the court, he was said to be secretive. The rumor ran that he would enter by the South Gate . . . and everyone went to the ramparts, the former revolutionaries shouting their joy louder than anyone. That crowd blocked all the streets, and persons of quality, lingering at the jewelers' or the Greeks', where they haggled over amber and purple, found themselves carried into the front row of spectators.

Thus Neter and Deborah leaned over a wall, and the little Jew said, shaking her brown locks: "Do you think he will really reign, this one . . . Amenophis?"

"What else?" The Atlantean seemed pale and distraught.

"I don't know . . ." said Deborah. "No, really. You hear so many stories! They say that in him we shall have a great, conquering king. They say he will raise up the peoples of Egypt like a wave, to hurl them upon Elam and Canaan . . . and perhaps on Mesopotamia and the Indies too. The earth will tremble before him, and he shall possess it in blood and tumult."

"I imagine," said Neter drily, "that he will think first of delivering his own country from Ptah and the shadows of Ptah."

"That—" Deborah stopped and bit her fingernail, as if she had said too much. The Atlantean gazed at her curiously.

"You don't believe it, do you? You have curious perceptions. You've changed since our last journey, Deborah!"

She lowered her voice. Around the two foreigners, the Theban mob exploded in color, shouts and laughter; women were chattering, children running naked, and a muffled psalmody arose from the priests' procession. But Neter, even in broad daylight, in the City, felt the shadow and ice of an eternal night. Deborah laughed slightly, leaned over, and with her dainty cat's tongue licked the white nape of her friend's neck.

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"It's good," she said. "Like cream. Why don't you like to make love, Neter? Of course, they say you'll be queen one day . . . don't forget your little handmaiden then! I'll tell you everything, if you promise not to betray me. Listen: each night I'm visited by a winged Keroub . . . no, not a Keroub: they have a bull's body, and they bellow. This one is like a feline—long, powerful and soft. He does whatever he likes with me, and he pours things into my soul . . . oh! I don't know how to tell you! It's terrible, and delicious."

"And Naphtali, Deborah?"

"He's a hundred years old! My friendship with the Visitor can't do him any harm. Why shouldn't you try it, Neter? It's nothing at all like our human stupidity: you grow so powerful, so wise—you become one with Ptah! It's such ecstacy! At the same time, you know you're lost, you know everything. . . ."

"You exaggerate," answered Neter. She would have liked to escape this friendly arm that embraced her, this charming, soiled creature, but now she knew: Destiny was beginning to weave its threads. In a pattern planned long before, Deborah was the unforeseeable and necessary arabesque.

Frozen with horror, Neter chose her words carefully. "Prove to me that you know one secret, just one . . . and I'll believe you."

Deborah saw herself mirrored in the clear gaze of her friend: she had vertical pupils, like a cat's.

"Well then," she said, "listen again. . . . After tonight, for a certainly, the Pharaoh will no longer be Amenophis, son of Ahmose."

"Do you mean . . . they'll kill him?"

"There won't be any need. The Ptahs are wise: they'll put another soul in his body. And he'll serve them, he will be their slave."

"Another soul? You're crazy. He has one of his own."

"Do you think so? Perhaps he has one, after all. But the Ptahs only need his face and his body. I've found out they often perform such operations. There's a phrase I happen to remember—perhaps you'll understand it: 'Since we have discovered we are resistant to all mutation, we shall live on in another fashion . . . men have a horror of princes with wings and talons!' "

"It's impossible," said Neter harshly. "The Pharaoh won't let those beasts come near him. He's well guarded."

"Yes. Except for tonight. For you know there's a very old custom: the armed Vigil. A young sovereign of Egypt passes the night before his coronation in the Temple of Ammon, in its Oasis. He must be alone. On the sill, a priest offers him a wine mixed with myrrh. Ptah knows the priest. In

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the wine there will be a mixture of herbs and a charm, so that Amenophis shall fall asleep, and the Most Mysterious shall come and take possession of that empty envelope—that vacant body. . . ."

Neter controlled herself again, but she had sunk her nails into her palm, and it was almost with relief that she felt the human warmth of her own blood. In a low, soft voice, she asked, "You don't find this an odious treachery? I'm not talking about Amenophis: but what about Egypt? She deserves another king."

"Oh, this one will be very great!" Deborah lowered her kohl-painted lids, with a guilty and voluptuous air. "Any anyhow . . . how can we know the gods? Perhaps it's already happened! Many princes who were hollow as bells have turned into Pharaohs full of wisdom. Suppose the trial of the Oasis is really nothing but . . . that exchange? My lover shall reign over Egypt! But don't tell Naphtali! And tonight, tonight . . ."

Neter had slipped down from the wall, but she could not move forward. It was, she thought, like a nightmare, in which you want to run, cry out—and you are fixed to the spot, while every word dies in your throat.

A cloud of scarlet dust veiled the horizon; fanfares burst out. Standing on the ramparts, the Thebans beat on their cymbals and let fall a rain of lotus and rose petals. The priests were waving their censers. Deborah called something, holding out her slender arms toward her friend. As often befell her in moments of great emotion, the Atlantean had to cling to the present by a cornice, a fellah's robe, to keep from toppling into one of the two vertiginous abysses that gaped for her equally: the future and the past.

She ran. She must warn, help . . . Above all, she must silence her thoughts—so many telepathic beings were hidden in that crowd—and now Deborah was their creature. She stopped, gasping: the street ahead was choked. Tiny as she was, the blue tunics and floating klaphtes of the priests blocked her view . . . she could have wept. Suddenly the hypnagogic fog—the state of indecision, of vacuity—in which she had floated all that day, was dissipated, and she realized with horror that she must see Amenophis at that instant: *otherwise she would never be sure.* Her little fists drummed boldly on the back of a tall Lydian, who turned with a grin. "So little, and so naughty! What do you want, O daughter of Isis?"

Panting, she stammered, "I must see the Pharaoh!"

"Oho! You're all crazy for that. Climb up here."

He was a musician; he lifted her onto his harp, which stood up-

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right in a sandalwood case. There she remained, like a sculptured figurine, a victory. It was time: down below, the bronze doors were opening; with a thunderous sound, amid clouds of aromatics, noisy, dazzling as a barbaric jewel, heavy —like a python with a thousand coils—the army of Mizraim entered Thebes.

Slim runners in leather aprons preceded the clumsy Ionian mercenaries, whose cuirasses prefigured interplanetary armor. Numidians galloped on their fine golden mares, and Libian Negroes led packs of desert leopards.

In a chariot drawn by four white stallions stood a golden statue, motionless. A serpent of emeralds—the royal Uraeus—writhed on his forehead; the dark, perfect countenance was bare. When the Pharaoh of Egypt passed, followed by the melodious wall of his harpists, he raised his eyes. Behind the thick grills of his lashes, Neter met two lakes of night: dark and dull. She could set her mind at rest: Amenophis I had no soul. Not yet.

In 2500, Hugh Page, the first paratime traveler, entered his cockpit after many handshakes, leaving Professor Reszky to fend for himself in the midst of a crowd of reporters. The importance people gave to this trip was beyond him. He wasn't leaving much behind, and he had no great love for his own era. There had been more beautiful ones; he'd learned about them in his hypno courses. Certain primitive statues, frescoes of the Italian Renaissance, enamels found in the syrinxes of the Valley of Kings, awoke in him some distant echo, natural, intensely moving. . . . He adjusted his electrode helmet and watched Reszky.

Snatches of conversation drifted over to him. What had that other freak said, again? *The Atlanteans, in order to travel in time, left vacant spaces, empty forms, in various eras. That explains the appearance of these great, unparalleled geniuses: da Vinci, Pascal, Einstein. They were men of the future.* . . . In the false daylight of the neons, the archaeologist's face was turning blue. Hugh consulted his chronometer, and pressed the selenium control lever.

And there was a different world.

An immense white moon hung over the desert. Page did not remember leaving the cabin—but here he was among these red dunes. The sand sparkled faintly; it looked like Syrtis Major, on Mars. He opened the faceplate of his helmet slightly, and a dry wind, charged with oxygen, burned his cheeks.

He was uneasy: was this really Earth? The first trial might be subject to routing errors. Under three metallic palms ran a thin crystal stream that seemed heavy

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to him, saturated with mineral salts.

For a moment the traveler wavered: he was done for; Reszky, mistaking the direction, had sent him into an unforeseeable future, a dead Earth—this desert was nothing but the bottom of an ocean, dried up by evaporation, and this cindery-tasting trickle, the last water. . . . The altered pattern of the stars, the limpid atmosphere bore out the horror of that theory: the stars seemed enormous, and the Pole Star had changed its place, as if the axis of the globe had straightened slightly. Would Reszky know how to find him again? . . . On the burned or frozen planets he had visited in the old days, at least he'd had his spaceship, but not here. . . .

Almost at the same moment, a savage howl, as alarming as an air-raid siren, came from behind a dune. With his electrogun off safety (though he could well believe the weapon was useless), Page saw a fantastic monster rise in outline against the white disk. The moon sparkled on its silvery, blue-shadowed pelt; tall as a loading crane, it had long, flexible legs and neck, a hump in the middle of its back, and a supercilious expression. The monster took a few lurching steps, then folded its knees, manlike, and fell over in the sand. And the spaceman heard a melodious sob.

A small silhouette detached itself from the shadow. A long blue cloak trailed behind her, and for an instant, Page glimpsed a face cast down, a pearly whiteness, a whiteness of cherry-trees in blossom, of the abyss—lashes pearled with tears, and a child's mouth. The girl ran blindly forward (to Hugh, she was undeniably a girl), and the traveler followed her: This life-form, the first intelligent one he had found, was delightful. He tried to pick up her thoughts. A flood of disorderly waves struck him (true, his psi faculties were unusually acute here): the girl was weary, frightened, she had been traveling all night. There was a feeling of urgency. And this wretched dromedary refused to go! Page went up to her, nearly asked her a question, but remembered in time that he was invisible and inaudible. Nevertheless, as if in answer, the girl's thoughts concentrated with extraordinary power on a foreign danger, alive and merciless—something that came from another world. For a moment, Page had a ridiculous hunch—other spacemen had arrived before him in this country, and the girl was fleeing from the invaders.

Meanwhile, in the turbulent mental flood, two images swam up with remarkable clarity. The first was that of an oasis and a semicircular building, constructed of enormous blocks of black marble and jasper—a solitary, nocturnal temple, from which radiated a

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feeling of horror. Hugh's hypnotic instruction enabled him to recognize one of the oldest sanctuaries in the world: the Temple of Ammon Ra, where all the sovereigns of Egypt, including Alexander the Great, had sought consecration. Then he was on Earth—but in the depths of what illusory past?

The strange girl went on running; she stumbled, and a second image detached itself from her thought-waves: a man—no, more than a man. Page could not make out his features—only the brilliance of a cuirass which looked, Page thought to himself, rather like space armor. This creature was threatened by some danger, worse than death. Trying to clarify that shadow, bring it into sharper detail, Page drew a blank. Evidently his reception was out of phase with the girl's sending: he saw nothing but the desert, and the image of the sphinx of Giza.

As if in despair at being unable to communicate more clearly, the fugitive stopped and wrung her hands. A shock, more felt than heard, had made the plain tremble, and yet nothing was to be seen: only, at the edge of vision, sand-devils danced like columns of incense-smoke. A second later, a whirlwind shape hurled itself past them: it was the white dromedary, its shadow flying like a cloud across the desert; ears laid back, neck trembling, it disappeared in a curtain of dust.

And Page saw the lions come.

The first roar sounded from the bottom of a fault, deep under the plain. Thunder rolled along the ground, then broke up into staccato trains of roars and shrieks. A wavering tornado arose among the dunes—a cloud of sand, claws and lightings-flashes—a wind from the forge. The girl fell to the ground, and before the spaceman could move, that volcano was upon them.

Twenty, or a hundred, or a thousand red sand-devils. A hundred, or a thousand long, roaring flames—muzzles carved in granite, manes intermingling—and when they came near, the twin pupils of boiling gold. Certainly there were more than enough to hurl back, rip to shreds, two vulnerable human bodies. Page had instinctively bent his knees, wrapping his arms around the slender body of the girl, who seemed to be hiding her face against him in spite of the space armor. He had had no time to draw his electro-gun. Could people die on the paratemporal plane? Reszky had said . . . He closed his eyes.

A minute later, he was still alive; and the brazier-wind, the living hurricane, had passed. The girl in his arms held herself still and attentive. Hugh opened his eyes, to see the tawny mass disappear over the horizon. A few stragglers galloped by, bounding aside from the spot where the Invisible

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stood. No dromedary was in sight, and the universe was settling down in vast waves of earth-shock.

Animals could sense "presences," the traveler reminded himself. He recalled familiar sights (so distant from this frenzied world): his dog pointing at an empty spot—a housecat motionless, staring at the night. For them, the darkness was alive. But the girl who had taken shelter against him? . . . She was standing; he could see her better now in the moonlight, and a dizziness overcame him. Page's time was full of spectacular girls, hard and civilized, admirable mannequins. Never before had he seen a creature who made him think of lilies.

"Lord," she said, "I must go. The trial is beginning, when each one must be alone. You know now . . . Ptah . . ."

Was it a prayer, addressed to some invisible god? She was already moving away. Now other shadows were passing over the desert. A chariot with shining wheels rolled past, and in it were two men speaking in curt thoughts. Once more Page saw the image of the oasis, its parallel palm-shadows, the temple with its pillars of jasper. But to these travelers, there was a man holding vigil within; and beyond doubt, he was the one the girl was trying to reach. Page made an effort and saw—beyond the sand and mist—a tall silhouette, a dark, handsome face that was strangely familiar, and the emeralds of the filet. "A king," he thought. "A Pharaoh. Probably they've got a date. My little stranger does all right for herself." Full of an unaccountable bitterness, he turned away from the oasis.

Now that he was left alone, he could better appreciate his state of being, suspended between temporal planes. He was actually floating above the dunes. He had only to think of a gap in the rock, and he found himself instantly on the edge of the cliff. Down below, cool air arose from a spring. "This is what they call levitation, or telekinesis," he thought. A solitary lion leaped up, roared, pricked his ears, then bounded aside, because Page was walking deliberately into him. The enormous beast ran off, head down, like a whipped dog. Mentally, Page made him turn back, sent him sliding over the cliff: so, animals obeyed him . . .

It was then that the danger became clear.

It wasn't a living being, at least not yet. Rather it was a shaft of mental waves—powerful, inexorable, commanding. It was a body-emptying thing, before which all human thought faced and died. He had to call on all his discipline to keep from running away; instead, he moved forward. This, he realized, was the customary attack of an ancient and carnivorous race which had developed its pow-

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ers of absorption at the expense of all moral faculties. A race of psychic vampires, in short, or else . . . The tide was so powerful that it automatically projected the image of a sphinx onto Page's vision. But this time, the sphinx was alive. . . .

"Why not?" Hugh asked himself. Terrestrial monuments are covered with these divine and bestial masks; planetary legends are full of horrible, insane things, blasphemous things that we try to forget, because it's too hard to live with them. But all the same, men have encountered those Assyrian bull-kings somewhere, those harpies and gorgons . . . Why not a Sphinx, reigning over the night?

Page wavered; the projected vision had struck him with such force that he experienced it as a physical blow; a curtain of blood veiled his sight, and a wave of hallucinations broke over him. "Just like a groggy fighter," he thought, trying to put up a defensive screen. But perhaps no hurt fighter had ever felt such thunderous pain. Yet the wave flowed back, and he caught his breath long enough to bring order into the sensations that were assailing him.

They were of all kinds, and evidently radiated from at least two different beings: one was dark and gigantic; built on the scale of a demented universe, it evoked black infinity, burned and frozen globes revolving around giant suns; and these stars bore the names of luminaries which humanity had not yet reached: Sirius, Altair, Aldebaran. . . . Was it from thence that the greedy, carnivorous beings came? These waves forced themselves upon him with their visions and discordant sounds, their worlds exploding in cosmic collisions; from the titanic bellowing of the saurians of their carboniferous ages, from the musky stenches of the primal swamps where all life was born and perished, they pulled together a history of combats, shouts and violence—a whole universe of terror, mental and physical.

Page could not doubt that these were the personal memories of a Monster. Ptah—the girl had spoken that name: Ptah . . . Under the name of Sokaris, he had already reigned over Memphis—or had that been one of his ancestors? At any rate, today he meant to stretch out his claws over the whole land. . . . But why should he launch an attack on a paratime traveler? (For an instant, the spaceman wished he had stuck to his own profession—precise, limited by the laws of physics . . . clearly, Reszky and his assistants had not foreseen this danger.) His struggles against the invading personality were growing weaker; sharp, penetrating, inhuman sensations were taking possession of his subconscious mind.

But a feebler wave, like a strain

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of music—a thread of crystal, a moonbeam—came to his aid. This one was profoundly human: she spoke of a cerulean sea, a continent of opal, a cold wisdom, built in harmony, that made you proud to be a Terran. Page's whole being went out toward that stream of images, and he realized that the stranger was fighting beside him. But then—the temple, the oasis . . . Was she not by the side of her handsome dark Pharaoh?

He had no time to reflect on it, for the carnivorous mind returned to the assault. Until now it had only shouted and thundered; it had been terror and helpless annihilation. . . . Now it was changing its tactics, having tested its adversary's strength—and not without surprise—; now it was making itself monstrously sweet, insinuating, attacking the nerves, which it filled to brimming with a horrible delight beyond all physical pleasure and sharper than pain. And it promised and murmured, almost at the level of consciousness, of terrible things; it dripped the essence of punishment and ecstasy. The being that had taken over his nervous system, and was performing astonishing symphonies on that clavier, had lived so long and drained so many frightful joys that the human mind dissolved at its touch, the human soul, irrevocably stained, fell into oblivion. In a flash of despair, Page sensed that all these experiences were happening at this very moment; by a concentration of his will, Ptah lived, and made him share his inferno.

Him. Always him. Then where was the Pharaoh that the Monster was to attack?

He fought as a man, as an explorer, one who had been taught to preserve his own personality in isolation and in chaos: he was Hugh Page, a unique human being, from the year 2500—and he had nothing to do with this outpouring of hatred and lust. That realization broke the spell; the wave of black and red withdrew. Hugh found himself on his knees under a dune; he had rolled among blocks of stone, and his hands were full of blood; the beating of his heart made him dizzy, and he realized that the last attack had been so violent, it had almost torn him out of the fourth dimension—he was regaining physical form. . . . He shuddered.

In the silence of the desert, a melodious thought-wave spoke (perhaps the voice of the stranger, but warmer and more penetrating). "Run! Oh, run! It's you they want to destroy!"

"Me? What for? I don't belong in this country, or this time."

"You know nothing about it. The most horrible danger—"

"Can I go to you?" Hugh asked—and each word tore his dry throat. "Can I be any help?"

"No. No. . . ."

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"I want to see you again"

"It's impossible. You're lost, if they succeed in materializing you."

"And can they do it?"

"I don't know. They have robbed so many Atlantean brains! Integrate yourself into another dimension. Don't think about me any more."

(That wasn't the stranger: she couldn't talk that way.)

"They have robbed so many Atlantean brains!"

His, too, undoubtedly—Page felt drained. Since he'd shared the memories and sensations of the Monster for some moments, it followed that the others had had access to his own knowledge. He shivered: whatever else he might be, he was a good physicist and a better spaceman. Would they know how to use his knowledge? Could they. . . ? He shuddered at the thought of Earth, in the year 2500, invaded by the bestial masks of pharaonic Egypt.

But: integrate himself into another dimension? On the other shore of Time, the silhouette of Professor Reszky seemed to him oddly insubstantial. That phantom ought to turn on a control board, press the "return" lever. . . . That seemed impossible. Suddenly, he began to appreciate the violent world into which he had fallen: it was *his* Earth, and yet a new planet: the air was intoxicatingly pure; all the colors leaped out in lively contrast, the pink moon among the sand-devils blazed incredibly . . . the luxuriant oasis, its palms as if washed by a rainstorm, everything, even the dizzy scents that rose from the pale cups of the water lilies, the musk of hidden beasts, the coolness of a spring, forcefully proclaimed a young, rich, intoxicating universe. And at the same time, never had horror and death been so immediate, so close: everything in this world was an invitation to live for the moment. "I live!" cried the osier-bed trampled beneath the tree-trunk legs of the hippopotamus. "I exist!" sparkled the moth in the jaws of darkness. The fleeting moment distilled a piercing delight.

It was in that pink glow that they showed themselves in outline, at the other side of the plain—and truly, Page had never seen anything more hideous on any carboniferous planet. To begin with, because there was a certain order, the parody of human discipline, in their movements, and because some of them, riding in chariots, holding the reins, seemed familiar, like childhood nightmares. (Who has not dreamed himself pursued, trailed by a pack, falling from a dizzy height, falling forever? . . .) Page had tried in vain to believe, on the strength of the hypno-courses, that many of Egypt's gods had little humanity

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about them; he hadn't been able to take it in. Now, from every hollow of the ground ("In that accursed land," says a Chaldean manuscript, "every hollow in the sand hides a million demons . . ."), from every dune, bizarre visions were springing up: winged or squat, octopod or cynocephalous, some crawling on the ground, with a crackling of coils, a sound and smell of the tide; others whirling in an eddy of plumes—all came toward the Oasis of Ammon, and there were saurians and giant rams, entities with the heads of jackals, the broad backs of hippopotamuses; the gods of Bubastis, Mendes, Assyria; monsters and idols without faces. All the terrors of the dark ages were following a conqueror's chariot.

Up above, upon wheels of gold, under a purple canopy, the living Sphinx was enthroned.

The procession advanced with inexorable slowness. There was no resisting it; nothing could have halted that march toward victory. All the reawakened terrors of childhood, all the old familiar spectres . . . a man would have been nothing but a doormat to that procession of gods.

And they were heading toward the Oasis of Ammon.

For a moment, the urge to be with the stranger in the Temple was so strong that Hugh bit his wrist. No, he hadn't come here for that. He was on a mission, he must simply collect and retain all the facts he could, fight if he were attacked, and return to his own era. But the mere thought of returning seemed to him cosmically absurd. And unfair . . .

On his knees, so exhausted he was, he crawled toward the spring in the reeds. The water was burning cold. He drank in great gulps, aware without surprise that his senses were growing more and more acute. The spring that fed the oasis disappeared a little farther down into a fault in the granite, from which arose a raucous murmuring. Curious, Hugh leaned over the edge, and a terrible wild-animal stench struck his nostrils. It was the lion *wadi*, on a lower level of the plain. It billowed like an ocean; it was a deep, reddish tidal wave, in which the thin trickle of water sparkled here and there. Hugh saw what man had never seen and lived.

The animals drank with courtesy, making room for the weakest. In the mass he could make out the great beasts of the Gulf, blunt-fashioned, with muzzles carved in sandstone, with their tumbling cubs and beautiful lionesses, the color of ripe corn. A little farther down were outlined the horns of a ram whose thirst had made him forget danger; a rhinoceros, with its little bloodshot eyes, rolled over, tearing up the margin of the crumbling cliff. Dune leopards, blossoming with black roses more

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plentifully than the fields of May, slunk among the towering obliqueness of striped giants. In the ripples of sand, tiny kraits hissed. . . .

All at once, as the wind changed, a motionless shiver went over the living mass. It was almost instantaneous. A beautiful lioness, pink as a nude woman, leaped away into the dunes. A tiger that was almost blue slashed the air. Jackals howled as they were trampled underfoot, and above the roaring concert could be heard the frightful laugh of the hyena. Astounded, Hugh realized that the animals were aware of his presence; the tidal wave was in motion ahead of him. He moved forward. It was a material force, unleashed, capable of sweeping anything out of its path—or anyone. . . .

"Come on, Ptah!" said Page to himself.

The collision of the two masses shook the desert.

Hugh Page came to himself in the deep coolness of the vaults. His head lay on a blue robe, folded up in a trough of marble, and he remembered that Egyptian beds included a half-moon-shaped cavity in place of the pillow. It made for sweet dreams, evidently. The idea was so foolish that he laughed. A ring of metal was squeezing his temples, and two immense opal eyes, veiled with long lashes, were watching him.

"You fought bravely," said a crystal voice. And after a silence: "And you are handsome. . . ."

"Then you can see me?" he asked politely, trying to get up. But a small hand restrained him.

"Don't move. When we picked you up, you seemed dead: all the lions of the desert and the whole army of Ptah had passed over your armor—luckily, it was made of tough material."

"Where is Ptah?"

"He has fled, I think," she said absently. "He's hiding in the desert—he's lost nearly everything he had, and after all, he's nothing but a big beast!"

"Who picked me up—was it you?"

"My father. My uncle Naphtali. Some strangers. You can pay them later; it doesn't matter much. In a few minutes, the remedy we've given you will begin to work and then you can walk, and go back to Thebes. There you will be received as a living god."

"But," said Hugh, "I don't want to go to Thebes! Certainly not, if everyone can see me now."

"A Pharaoh must be crowned in Thebes."

"But—"

"And you are the Pharaoh. Your name is Amenophis I, son of Ahmose, grandson of Kamose. You rule over the two Egypts, the White and the Blue; over part of Asia, and the numberless peoples of the desert. You wear the

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Uraeus and the Pschent, and you are a god."

The remedy must have worked, for Hugh Page sat up in his burst armor.

"Listen," he said, "one of us is crazy: my name is Hugh Page, and I'm a pilot on a mission. I came here from the year 2500, via the Time Stream, and I'm going to go back the same way. Anyhow, I thought I understood yesterday—reading your thoughts—that the Pharaoh Amenophis was in this temple. Where is he? He's the real king of Egypt, and I have no business usurping his prerogatives."

The bluegray eyes expressed a delightful despair. "Uncle Naphtali!" the stranger cried. "Uncle Naphtali! Come quickly! The shock was greater than we thought—our prince is mad!"

An admirable white-bearded oldster, with the manner of a patriarch, threw himself on Hugh and took his pulse. "O Pharaoh! he said. "May your name be blessed a million and again a million times. . . . May Your Majesty recover his senses: there is no more fever."

"I'm no more the Pharaoh than you are!"

"A common effect of battle against the demons, Sire: I am your cup-bearer and your court poet, I recognize you formally as my king. Would you like me to call my brother Joseph, your high commissioner? Or my brother Dan, your chief of police? Or the High Priest Isides, who is present. . . ."

"You wear the Uraeus and the Pschent, Sire," said a calm blue oldster.

Hugh put his hand to his forehead—he felt the scales of the golden serpent, the cold of the jewels. Kneeling before him, a Nubian slave offered a disk of silver which acted as a mirror. Was this really his face, this dark, perfect image, with the great eyes in which flashes of light came and went? . . .

"I—" he began. "I don't understand any more. There's been a substitution."

"An impossible thing, Sire: your servants have kept vigil all the night in the oasis. And before, and after the combat, the princess Neter, your betrothed, remained by your side."

The princess Neter, his betrothed . . .

He looked deeply into the opal eyes that were smiling at him. She was the most delightful girl he had ever met, and a loyal comrade in battle. She had picked him up among the remains of the monsters. It seemed to him that he had always known her—or at least dreamed of her, in a past which was perhaps really the future. . . .

"Leave us alone," he said, in an imperious voice that was strange to him. "I wish to speak with the princess Neter."

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And they were alone, before the altar of Ammon-Ra, among the holy disks and the pillars of jasper. Page leaned against the base of a statue, and Neter took his hand to caress it softly with her long lashes.

"I'm not Amenophis I," he said. "And you know it, Neter."

"You will be Amenophis."

"What good is this cruel game? Some day they'll find the real Pharaoh—or his corpse."

"There is no other Pharaoh. Do you think the jealous lords of the desert would have let him live? *There was only a shadow, an envelope of our making which already had your face, because we Atlanteans have always known you would come.* It was so perfect that even Ptah let himself be tempted to take it. . . . That turned out very well, incidentally: he has given you all his knowledge. . . . I admired your battle. You will be a great king, Amenophis."

"But the other Pharaohs—"

"How do you know their origins were any different? It's due to paratime travelers that humanity has been able to progress in spite of invasions and cataclysms. That's the usefulness, and the real meaning of your dicovery. Egypt needs you. And so do I."

The fine strands of her hair smelled of honey and amber. Her pale mouth was there—and Hugh felt himself weakening. He tried once more to get his footing in the stable, solid world where he had thought he belonged. "There can't be any interference with the Time Stream. This is a dream we're in!"

"No: a privileged configuration. Amenophis I comes out of the Temple of Ammon changed, you know. The chroniclers will say: *'He grew like unto the gods.'*"

"Exactly, and I'm not. Not even a little bit! And besides—" he seized this idea with the despair of a castaway who, drowning, sinks contentedly to the bottom—"don't forget, I may be called back to the year 2500 at any moment! All it takes is for Professor Reszky to pull the lever. . . ."

"No," said Neter. "*'We moon-fishers, ascending the Time Stream, gather souls and images in our nets.'* Someone said that. . . . Kiss me, and you'll understand. Now, do you see? The paratime cockpit is empty. . . . Your body is here."

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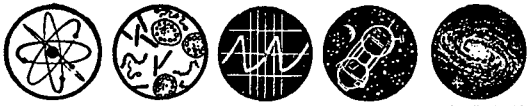

Scholar, bon vivant, *and (by his own modest accounting) incredibly accomplished lover, Dr. Asimov is also an authority on weight.*

THE WEIGHTING GAME

by Isaac Asimov

SCIENTIFIC THEORIES HAVE A TENDENCY TO FIT THE INTELLECTUAL fashions of the time.

For instance, back in the 4th Century B.C., two Greek philosophers, Leucippus of Miletus and Democritus of Abdera worked out an atomic theory. All objects, they said, were made up of atoms. There were as many different kinds of atoms as there were fundamentally different substances in the universe. (The Greeks recognized four fundamentally different substances, or "elements": fire, air, water and earth.)

By combinations of the elements in varying proportions, the many different substances with which we are familiar were formed. Through a process of separation and recombination in new proportions, one substance could be converted to another.

All this was very well, but in what fashion did these atoms differ from one another? How might the atom of one element be distinguished from the atom of another?

Now mind you, atoms were far too small to see or to detect by any method. The Greek atomists were therefore perfectly at liberty to choose any form of distinction they wished. Perhaps different atoms had different colors, or different reflective powers or bore little labels written in fine Attic Greek. Or perhaps they varied in hardness, in odor, or in tem-

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perature. Any of these might have sufficed as the basis for some coherent structural theory of the universe, given ingenuity enough—and if the Greeks had anything at all, it was ingenuity.

But here was where intellectual fashion came in. The Greek specialty was geometry. It was almost (though not quite) the whole of mathematics to them, and it invaded all other intellectual disciplines as far as possible. Consequently, if the question of atomic distinctions came up, the answer was inevitably geometric.

The atoms (the Greek atomists decided) differed in shape. The atoms of fire might be particularly jagged; which was why fire hurt. The atoms of water were smoothly spherical, perhaps, which was why water flowed so easily. The atoms of earth, on the other hand, could be cubical which was why earth was so solid and stable. And so on.

This all had the merit of sounding very plausible and rational, but since there was no evidence for atoms at all, one way or the other, let alone atoms of different shapes, it remained just an intellectual exercise; not any more valid, necessarily, than the intellectual exercises of Greek philosophers who were non-atomist in their thinking. The non-atomists were more persuasive in their exercises and atomism remained a minority view—very minority—for over two thousand years.

Atomism was revived in the first decade of the 19th Century by the English chemist, John Dalton. He, too, believed everything was made up of atoms which combined and recombined in different proportions to make up all the substances we know.

In Dalton's time, the notion of elements had changed to the modern one, so that he could speak of atoms of carbon, hydrogen and oxygen, rather than of atoms of fire and water. Furthermore, a vast array of chemical observations had been recorded during the 17th and 18th Centuries, which could all be neatly explained by an atomic theory. This made the existence of atoms (still unseen and unseeable) a much more useful hypothesis than it had been in Greek times.

But now Dalton was faced with the same problem the Greeks had faced. How was an unseeable atom of one type to be distinguished from an unseeable atom of another type?

Well, the science of 1800 was no longer geometric. It was merely metric. That is, it was based on the measurement of three fundamental properties; mass (commonly miscalled "weight"), distance and time. These three together were sufficient to deal with the mechanical Newtonian universe.

Consequently, Dalton followed the intellectual fashion of the time

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and ignored form and shape. All atoms to him were featureless little spheres without internal structure. Instead, he automatically thought of mass, distance and time and of these three the most clearly applicable was mass. As part of his theory, he therefore decided that atoms were distinguishable by mass only. All atoms of a particular element had identical mass, while the atoms of any one element had a mass that was different from those of any other element.

Dalton then went on—and this was perhaps his greatest single contribution—to try to determine what those different masses were.

Now there was no question of actually determining the mass of an atom in grams. That was not possible for quite some time to come. Relative masses, however, were another thing entirely.

For instance, hydrogen and oxygen atoms combine to form a molecule of water. (A "molecule" is the name applied to any reasonably stable combination of atoms.) It can be determined by analysis that in forming water, each gram of hydrogen combines with 8 grams of oxygen. In similar fashion, it could be determined that 1 gram of hydrogen always combines with just 3 grams of carbon to form methane. And, sure enough, 3 grams of carbon always combine with just 8 grams of oxygen to form carbon monoxide.

In this way, we are determining "equivalent weights"; that is the weights of different elements that are equivalent to each other in the formation of compounds. (A "compound" is a substance whose molecules are made up of more than one kind of atom.) If we set the equivalent weight of hydrogen arbitrarily equal to 1, the equivalent weight of carbon is 3 and the equivalent weight of oxygen is 8.

How can this be related to atoms? Well, Dalton made the simplest assumption (which is what one should always do) and decided that one atom of hydrogen combined with one atom of oxygen to form water. If that were so, then the atoms of oxygen must be eight times as heavy as the atoms of hydrogen, which is the best way of explaining why 1 gram of hydrogen combines with 8 grams of oxygen. The same number of atoms on each side, you see, but the oxygen atoms are each eight times as heavy as the hydrogen atoms.

Thus, if we arbitrarily set the atomic weight of hydrogen equal to 1, then the atomic weight of oxygen is 8. By the same reasoning, the atomic weight of carbon is 3, if a molecule of methane consists of one atom of carbon combined with one atom of hydrogen.

The inevitable next question, though, is just this: How valid is Dalton's assumption? Do atoms necessarily combine one-to-one? The answer is: No, not necessarily.

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Whereas 3 grams of carbon combine with 8 grams of oxygen to form carbon monoxide, 3 grams of carbon will also combine with 16 grams of oxygen to form carbon dioxide.

Well, then, if we assume that the carbon monoxide molecule is made up of one atom of carbon and one atom of oxygen, and let C represent carbon and O represent oxygen, we can write the molecule of carbon monoxide as CO. But if carbon combines with twice the quantity of oxygen to form a molecule of a substance with different properties, we can assume, on the basis of atomic theory, that each atom of carbon combines with *two* atoms of oxygen to form carbon dioxide. The formula of carbon dioxide is therefore CO_2.

On the other hand, if you reasoned that the molecule of carbon dioxide was CO, then the molecule of carbon monoxide would have to be C_2O. The first alternative, presented in the previous paragraph, happens to be the correct one, but in either alternative we come up against a molecule in which one atom of one element combines with two atoms of another element.

Once you admit that a molecule may contain more than one of a particular kind of atom, you must re-examine the structure of the water molecule. Must it be formed of an atom of hydrogen and one of oxygen, with a formula of HO? What if its formula were HO_2 or HO_4 or H_4O or, for that matter, $H_{17}O_{67}$.

Fortunately, there was a way of deciding the matter. In 1800, two English chemists, William Nicholson and Anthony Carlisle had shown that if an electric current were passed through water, hydrogen and oxygen gases were produced. It was quickly found that hydrogen was produced in just twice the volume that oxygen was. Thus, although the ratio of hydrogen to oxygen in water was 1 to 8 in terms of mass, it was 2 to 1 in terms of volume.

Was there any significance to this? Perhaps not. The atoms in hydrogen gas might be spaced twice as far apart as the atoms in oxygen gas, so that the volume difference might have no relation to the number of atoms produced.

However, in 1811, an Italian chemist, Amedeo Avogadro, suggested that in order to explain the known behavior of gases in forming chemical combinations, it was necessary to assume that equal volumes of different gases contained equal numbers of particles. (The particles could be either atoms or molecules.)

Therefore, if the volume of hydrogen produced by the electrolysis of water was twice the volume of oxygen, then twice as many particles of hydrogen were produced as of oxygen. If these particles are as-

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sumed to be atoms, or molecules containing the same number of atoms in both hydrogen or oxygen (the latter turned out to be true) then the water molecule contained twice as many hydrogen atoms as oxygen atoms.

The formula for water could not be HO, therefore, but had to be, at the very simplest, H_2O. If 8 grams of oxygen combined with 1 gram of hydrogen, it meant that the single oxygen atom is eight times as heavy as the two hydrogen atoms taken together. If you still set the atomic weight of hydrogen at 1, then the atomic weight of oxygen is equal to 16.

In the same way, it was found eventually that the formula of methane was CH_4 so that the one carbon atom had to be three times as heavy as the four hydrogen atoms taken together. (The equivalent weight of carbon is 3, remember.) Thus, if the atomic weight of hydrogen is 1, then the atomic weight of carbon is 12.

"Avogadro's hypothesis", as it came to be called, made it possible to come to another decision. One liter of hydrogen combined with one liter of chlorine to form hydrogen chloride. It was therefore a fair working assumption to suppose that the hydrogen chloride molecule was made up of one atom of hydrogen and one atom of chlorine. The formula of hydrogen chloride (allowing "C1" to symbolize "chlorine") could then be written HC1.

The liter of hydrogen and the liter of chlorine contain equal numbers of particles, Avogadro's hypothesis tells us. If we assume that the particles consist of individual atoms, then the number of hydrogen chloride molecules formed must be only half as many as the total number of hydrogen atoms and chlorine atoms with which we start. (Just as the number of married couples is only half as many as the total number of men and women, assuming everyone is married.)

It should follow that the hydrogen chloride gas that is formed has only half the total volume of the hydrogen and chlorine with which we start. One liter of hydrogen plus one liter of chlorine (two liters in all) should produce but one liter of hydrogen chloride.

However, this is not what happens. A liter of hydrogen and a liter of chlorine combine to form *two* liters of hydrogen chloride. The total volume of gas does not change and therefore the total number of particles can not change. The simplest way out of the dilemma is to assume that hydrogen gas and chlorine gas are not collections of single atoms after all, but collections of molecules, each of which is made up of two atoms.

One hydrogen molecule (H_2) would combine with one chlorine

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molecule (Cl_2) to form two molecules of hydrogen chloride (HCl, HCl.) The total number of particles would not change and neither would the total volume. By similar methods it could be shown that oxygen gas is also made up of molecules with two atoms apiece (O_2).

Using this sort of reasoning, plus other generalization I am not mentioning, it was possible to work out atomic weights and molecular structures for a whole series of substances. The one who was busiest at it was a Swedish chemist named Jöns Jakob Berzelius who, by 1828, had put out a series of atomic weights that were pretty darned good even by modern standards.

However, the course of true love never does run smooth; nor, it seems, does the course of science. A chemist is as easily confused as the next guy and all during the first half of the 19th Century, the words "atom" and "molecule" were used interchangeably. Few chemists got them straight and few distinguished the atomic weight of chlorine, which was 35½, from the molecular weight of chlorine which was 71 (since a molecule of chlorine contains two atoms.) Then again, the chemists confused atomic weight and equivalent weight, and had difficulty seeing that though the equivalent weights of carbon and oxygen were 3 and 8 respectively, the atomic weights were 12 and 16 respectively. (And, to make matters worse, the molecular weight of oxygen was 32.)

This reduced all chemical calculations, upon which decisions as to molecular structure were based, to sheer chaos. Things weren't too bad with the simple molecules of inorganic chemistry, but in organic chemistry, where molecules contained dozens of atoms, the confusion was ruinous. Nineteen different formulas were suggested for acetic acid which, with a molecule containing merely eight atoms, was one of the simplest of the organic compounds.

In 1860, then, a German chemist named Friedrich August Kekule organized the first International Chemical Congress in order to deal with the matter. It assembled at Karlsruhe in Germany.

The hit of the Congress was an Italian chemist named Stanislao Cannizzaro. In formal speeches and in informal talks he hammered away at the importance of straightening out the matter of atomic weights. He pointed out how necessary it was to distinguish between atoms and molecules and between equivalent weights and atomic weights. Most of all, he explained over and over again the significance of the hypothesis of his countryman, Avogadro, a hypothesis most chemists had been ignoring for half a century.

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He made his case and over the course of the next decade, chemistry began to straighten up and fly right.

The result was pure gold. Once Cannizzaro had sold the notion of atomic weights, a few chemists began to arrange the elements in the order of increasing atomic weight to see what would happen. About sixty elements were known in 1860, you see, and they were a bewildering variety of types, makes and models. No one could predict how many more elements remained to be found or what their properties might be.

The first attempts to make an atomic weight arrangement seemed to be interesting, but chemists as a whole remained unconvinced that it was anything more than a form of chemical numerology. Then along came a Russian chemist named Dmitri Ivanovich Mendeleev who, in 1869, made the most elaborate arrangement yet. In order to make his table come out well, he left gaps which, he insisted, signified the presence of yet undiscovered elements. He predicted the properties of three elements in particular and within a dozen years, those three elements were discovered and their properties jibed with those predicted by Mendeleev in every particular.

The sensation was indescribable. Atomic weights were the hit of the season and a number of chemists began to devote their careers to the more and more accurate determination of atomic weights. A Belgian chemist, Jean Servais Stas, had already produced a table of atomic weights even better than that of Berzelius in the 1860's, but the matter reached its chemical peak in the first decade of the 20th century, just a hundred years after Dalton's first attempts in this direction. The American chemist, Theodore William Richards, analyzed compounds with fantastic precautions against impurity and error and obtained such accurate atomic weight values that he received the 1914 Nobel Prize in chemistry for his work.

But as fate would have it, by that time, atomic weights had gotten away from chemists and entered the domain of the physicist.

The break came with the discovery of the subatomic particles in the 1890's. The atom was *not* a featureless spherical particle, it turned out. It was a conglomerate of still smaller particles, some of which were electrically charged.

It turned out then that the fundamental distinction between atoms of different elements was not the atomic weight at all, but the quantity of positive electric charge upon the nucleus of the atom. (Again, this fit the intellectual fashion of the time, for as the 19th Century

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wore on, the mechanical Newtonian universe gave way to a universe of force-fields according to the theories of the English chemist Michael Faraday and the Scottish physicist, James Clerk Maxwell. Electric charge fits into this force-field scheme.)

It turned out that most elements consisted of varieties of atoms of somewhat different atomic weight. These varieties are called "isotopes" and, for a discussion of them, see my article THE EVENS HAVE IT (F & SF, August, 1961).

Well, then, what we have been calling the atomic weight is only the average of the weights of the various isotopes making up the element.

Physicists began to determine the relative masses of the individual isotopes by non-chemical methods, with a degree of accuracy far beyond the ordinary chemical methods even of Nobel Laureate Richards. To get an accurate atomic weight it was then only necessary to take a weighted average of the masses of the isotopes making up the elements, allowing for the natural percentage of each isotope in the elements as found in nature.

The fact that atomic weights had thus become a physical rather than a chemical measurement might not have been embarrassing, even for the most sensitive chemist, were it not for the fact that physicists began to use atomic weight values slightly different from that used by the chemists. And what made it really bad was that the physicists were right and the chemists wrong.

Let me explain.

From the very beginning, the measurement of atomic weights had required the establishment of a standard. The most logical standard seemed to be that of setting the atomic weight of hydrogen equal to 1. It was suspected then (and it is known now) that hydrogen possessed the lightest possible atom, so setting it equal to 1 was the most natural thing in the world.

The trouble was that in determining atomic weights one had to start with equivalent weights. (In the beginning, anyway.) To determine equivalent weights, one needed to work with two elements that combined easily. Now hydrogen combined directly with but few elements, whereas oxygen combined directly with many. It was a matter of practical convenience to use oxygen, rather than hydrogen, as a standard.

To do this, a slight modification was necessary.

Atomic weights, after all, don't match in exactly whole-number ratios. If the atomic weight of hydrogen is set at exactly 1, then the atomic weight of oxygen is not quite 16. It is, instead, closer to 15.9.

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But if oxygen is the element most often used in calculating equivalent weights, it would be inconvenient to be forever using a figure like 15.9. It is an easy alternative to set the atomic weight of oxygen exactly at 16 and let the atomic weight of hydrogen come out a trifle over 1. It comes out to 1.008, in fact.

We can call this the "0 = 16" standard. It made chemists very happy and there arose nothing to challenge it until the 1920's. Then came trouble.

Oxygen, it was discovered in 1929, was a mixture of three different isotopes. Out of every 100,000 oxygen atoms, 99,759, to be sure, had an atomic weight of about 16. Another 204, however, had an atomic weight of about 18, while the remaining 37 had an atomic weight of 17. (The isotopes can be symbolized as O^{16}, O^{17} and O^{18}.)

This meant that when chemists set oxygen equal to 16, they were setting a weighted average of the three isotopes equal to 16. The common oxygen atoms were just a little under 16 (15.9956, to be exact) and the masses of the relatively few oxygen atoms of the heavier isotopes pulled that figure up to the 16 mark.

Physicists working with individual nuclei were more interested in a particular isotope than in the arbitrary collecton of isotopes in an element. In this they had logic on their side for the mass of an individual isotope is, as far as we know, absolutely constant, while the average mass of the atoms of an element fluctuates slightly as the mixture varies a tiny bit under different conditions.

Now we have two scales. First there is the "chemical atomic weight" on the "0 = 16" standard. Second, there is the "physical atomic weight" on the "$O^{16} = 16$" standard.

On the chemical atomic weight scale, the atomic weight of oxygen is 16.0000; while on the physical atomic weight scale, the heavier oxygen isotopes pull the average weight up to 16.0044. Naturally, all the other atomic weights must change in proportion, and every element has an atomic weight that is 0.027 percent higher on the physical scale than on the chemical scale. Thus, hydrogen has a chemical atomic weight of 1.0080 and a physical atomic weight of 1.0083.

This isn't much of a difference, but it isn't neat. Chemists and physicists shouldn't disagree like that. Yet chemists, despite the weight of logic against them, were reluctant to abandon their old figures and introduce confusion when so many reams of calculations in the chemical literature had been based on the old chemical atomic weights.

Fortunately, after three decades of disagreement, a successful compromise was reached.

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It occurred to the physicists that, in using an "$O^{16} = 16$" standard, they were kowtowing to a chemical prejudice which no longer had validity. The only reason that oxygen was used as the standard was the ease with which oxygen could be used in determining equivalent weights.

But the physicists weren't using equivalent weights; they didn't give a continental for equivalent weights. They were determining the masses of charged atoms by sending them through a magnetic field of known strength and measuring the effect upon the paths of those atoms.

In this connection, oxygen atoms were not the best atoms to use as standard; carbon atoms were. The mass of the most common carbon isotope, C^{12}, was more accurately known than was that of any other isotope. Moreover, C^{12} had a mass that was 12.003803 on the physical scale but was almost exactly 12 on the chemical scale.

Why not, then, set up a "$C^{12} = 12$" scale? It would be just as logical as the "$O^{16} = 16$" scale. What's more the "$C^{12} = 12$" scale would be almost exactly like that of the chemical "$O = 16$" scale.

In 1961, the International Union of Pure and Applied Physics issued a ukase that this be done. The mass of C^{12} was set at exactly 12.000000, a decrease of 0.033 percent. Naturally, the masses of all other isotopes had to decrease by exactly the same percentage, and the "$C^{12} = 12$" scale fell very slightly below the "$O = 16$" scale.

Thus, the chemical atomic weights of hydrogen and oxygen were 1.0080 and 16.0000 respectively. The atomic weights on the new physical scale were 1.00797 and 15.9994 respectively.

The difference is now only 0.003 percent, only one-tenth of the difference between the chemical scale and the old physical scale.

The chemists could no longer resist; the difference was so small that it would not affect any of the calculations in the literature. Consequently, the International Union of Pure and Applied Chemistry has also accepted the "$C^{12} = 12$" scale. Physicists and chemists once again, as of 1961, speak the same atomic weight language.

Note, too, how it was done. The physicists made most of the adjustment in actual value and that was a victory for the chemists. The chemists, on the other hand, adopted the logic of the single isotope as standard, and that was a victory for the physicists.

And since the standard which has now been adopted is the most accurate one yet, the net result is a victory for everybody.

Now *that* is the way to run the world—but I'll refrain from trying to point a moral.

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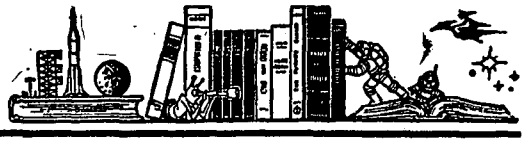
BOOKS



THE PRIMAL URGE, **Brian Aldiss, Ballantine, 50¢**

THE SILVER EGGHEADS, **Fritz Leiber, Ballantine, 50¢**

AND SOME WERE HUMAN, **Lester Del Ray, Ballantine, 35¢**

PROLOGUE TO ANALOG, **edited by John W. Campbell, Doubleday, $3.95**

THE FOURTH DIMENSION SIMPLY EXPLAINED, **Dover, $1.35**

We are appalled this month to be forced to slate two of our favorite authors; men whose work we admire, whose talent we envy, and whose books we always open eagerly, anticipating an exciting adventure in literature. They are Brian Aldiss and Fritz Leiber.

Mr. Aldiss is well known for splendid short stories including two of the most spectacular we have ever read, "Poor Little Warrior" and "The New Father Christmas;" his books, "Starship" and "No Time Like Tomorrow;" and the "Hothouse Series" which has recently appeared in this magazine and created a furor in the science fiction world. Mr. Leiber's powerful and mordant stories have varied from the hilarious "The Night He Cried" to the unsurpassed "Coming Attraction;" and surely everyone must remember "Conjure Wife" and "Gather Darkness."

Both of these gentlemen have a quality without which the greatest talent in the world is useless; a vital grip on reality which enables

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them to permeate their works with believability. What the devil are we to do, then, when each of them comes up with a silly, incredible novel, especially when both books are attempts at humor?

THE PRIMAL URGE, by Mr. Aldiss, asks the question: what would happen to the English people if their emotional state was made apparent to the world? He answers this through the passage of a law in the near future requiring all persons to wear an ER, an Emotional Register, on the forehead. This is a disc, permanently affixed, which glows in colors that reveal the emotional state of the wearer.

On this premise, Mr. Aldiss builds a transition society, replete with problems, slang, topical jokes, sexual conflicts, diplomatic difficulties, etc., etc. The net result is one prodigious yawn. The premise is so entirely contrary to human nature, so obviously a what-would-happen-if gimmick, that it was impossible for this department to become interested in the characters or their conflicts.

THE SILVER EGGHEADS, by Mr. Leiber, extrapolates the reading habits and writing problems of the pulp fiction world into a far future in which pulp literature is ground out by gigantic "word-mills," tended by "writers" whose jobs are merely maintenance of the machines. The writers revolt and smash the machines, and Mr. Leiber is off on a mishmash of writers, publishers, robots and disembodied brains, all in a preposterous turmoil over the production of pulp and science fiction.

Now since both books are, as we have said, comedies, it may be objected that this department has no sense of humor. We can offer no defense because there is no arguing about taste in humor; but we can make this point: humor is meaningless and can never come off unless it stems from the absurdities of human nature. Mr. Aldiss and Mr. Leiber have succeeded in being absurd, but somewhere along the line they lost their grasp on humanity.

And while we're on that theme, we might as well discuss AND SOME WERE HUMAN, by Lester Del Ray, which, it grieves us to report, is similarly lacking in any comprehension of human or parahuman motives and behaviour. In eight stories, Mr. Del Ray covers a variety of themes from the romance of an oak dryad with a mortal ("Forsaking All Others") to the clash between Neanderthal and Cro Magnon Man ("The Day Is Done") and the yearning of a robot for a man and vice versa ("Helen O'Loy").

Mr. Del Ray has attempted to establish moods rather than depict action. Unfortunately, mood-writing demands a poetic insight and discipline beyond his ability; he is

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merely sentimental. Moreover, his ear for period and non-human dialogue needs inspiration. For example, in "The Day Is Done," in which a Neanderthal woman is reproached by her man for getting drunk, she replies in Mr. Del Ray's ludicrous concept of Neanderthalese:

"Well, so what if I did?" Liquor had sharpened her tongue. "That no-good son of the chief come here, after me to be telling him stories. And to make my old tongue free, he brings me the root brew. Ah, what stories I'm tellin'—and some of them true, too!" She gestured toward a crude pot. "I reckon he steals it, but what's that to us? Help yourself, Hairy One. It ain't ever' day we're getting the brew."

In PROLOGUE TO ANALOG, John W. Campbell has assembled ten stories from *Analog Science Fact & Fiction,* formerly *Astounding Science-Fiction,* formerly *Astounding Tales of Super-Science.* The changes in title are a short history of Mr. Campbell's illustrious twenty-five year association with the magazine. Almost singlehandedly he raised science fiction from the pulp level to an esteemed niche in literature, and he should be revered for his work.

It needs a special sort of dedication to perform such a task, and Mr. Campbell reveals this quality in his selection of stories by Isaac Asimov, H. Beam Piper, Eric Frank Russell, Ralph Williams, Christopher Anvil, and others. They reflect his romantic love of science.

Mr. Campbell has a delicious childlike sense of wonder. His love is not real science, which is hard, monotonous work, preceded by meticulous preparation, accompanied by agonizing attention to detail, and culminating in no melodramatic moments; no, his is a sentimental science, delighting in procedural magic, and believing fondly in The Inspired Renegade Who Prevails Despite Stubborn Conservatives Who Turn Science Into A Sacred Cow.

Frankly, we have a sneaking suspicion that, like most amateur scientists, he has a passion to make a discovery, and leave behind him "Campbell's Axiom," or "The Fissure of Campbell," or even "Campbell's Disease." We sympathise. We used to suffer from "Campbell's Syndrome" ourself.

THE FOURTH DIMENSION SIMPLY EXPLAINED is a collection of essays selected from those submitted in the *Scientific American's* prize competition fifty years ago. It's a charming period piece, offering nothing new to seasoned science fiction fans already on easy terms with non-Euclidian geometry; yet worth reading.

—Alfred Bester

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Science-columnist and -lecturer, pater familias, *patent attorney and scuba-diver, Ted Thomas denies that he has ever —unlike the p.a. in the Charles Addams cartoon—tried out a supposed deathray-gun on passers-by.* We are not so sure . . . *At any rate, we watched him, once, cross the Delaware under water (something Washington never did), and against a damnably strong current. The air was warm, but seemed—somehow—to grow colder and colder until, at last, he emerged on the distant shore . . .*

This curt and chilling tale, which seems for most of its brief length to be merely one of the best action stories you have ever read, poses a question which—once put—the readers will recognize as having echoed in their own minds forever.

TEST

by Theodore L. Thomas

ROBERT PROCTOR WAS A GOOD driver for so young a man. The Turnpike curved gently ahead of him, lightly travelled on this cool morning in May. He felt relaxed and alert. Two hours of driving had not yet produced the twinges of fatigue that appeared first in the muscles in the base of the neck. The sun was bright, but not glaring, and the air smelled fresh and clean. He breathed it deeply, and blew it out noisily. It was a good day for driving.

He glanced quickly at the slim, grey-haired woman sitting in the front seat with him. Her mouth was curved in a quiet smile. She watched the trees and the fields slip by on her side of the pike. Robert Proctor immediately looked back at the road. He said, "Enjoying it, Mom?"

"Yes, Robert." Her voice was as cool as the morning. "It is very pleasant to sit here. I was thinking of the driving I did for you when you were little. I wonder if you enjoyed it as much as I enjoy this."

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He smiled, embarrassed. "Sure I did."

She reached over and patted him gently on the arm, and then turned back to the scenery.

He listened to the smooth purr of the engine. Up ahead he saw a great truck, spouting a geyser of smoke as it sped along the Turnpike. Behind it, not passing it, was a long blue convertible, content to drive in the wake of the truck. Robert Proctor noted the arrangement and filed it in the back of his mind. He was slowly overtaking them, but he would not reach them for another minute or two.

He listened to the purr of the engine, and he was pleased with the sound. He had tuned that engine himself over the objections of the mechanic. The engine idled rough now; but it ran smoothly at high speed. You needed a special feel to do good work on engines, and Robert Proctor knew he had it. No one in the world had a feel like his for the tune of an engine.

It was a good morning for driving, and his mind was filled with good thoughts. He pulled nearly abreast of the blue convertible and began to pass it. His speed was a few miles per hour above the Turnpike limit, but his car was under perfect control. The blue convertible suddenly swung out from behind the truck. It swung out without warning and struck his car near the right front fender, knocking his car to the shoulder on the left side of the Turnpike lane.

Robert Proctor was a good driver, too wise to slam on the brakes. He fought the steering wheel to hold the car on a straight path. The left wheels sank into the soft left shoulder, and the car tugged to pull to the left and cross the island and enter the lanes carrying the cars heading in the opposite direction. He held it, then the wheel struck a rock buried in the soft dirt, and the left front tire blew out. The car slewed, and it was then that his mother began to scream.

The car turned sideways and skidded part of the way out into the other lanes. Robert Proctor fought against the steering wheel to straighten the car, but the drag of the blown tire was too much. The scream rang steadily in his ears, and even as he strained at the wheel one part of his mind wondered coolly how a scream could so long be sustained without a breath. An oncoming car struck his radiator from the side and spun him viciously, full into the left-hand lanes.

He was flung into his mother's lap, and she was thrown against the right door. It held. With his left hand he reached for the steering wheel and pulled himself erect against the force of the spin. He turned the wheel to the left, and tried to stop the spin and careen

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out of the lanes of oncoming traffic. His mother was unable to right herself; she lay against the door, her cry rising and falling with the eccentric spin of the car.

The car lost some of its momentum. During one of the spins he twisted the wheel straight, and the car wobblingly stopped spinning and headed down the lane. Before Robert Proctor could turn it off the pike to safety a car loomed ahead of him, bearing down on him. There was a man at the wheel of that other car, sitting rigid, unable to move, eyes wide and staring and filled with fright. Alongside the man was a girl, her head against the back of the seat, soft curls framing a lovely face, her eyes closed in easy sleep. It was not the fear in the man that reached into Robert Proctor; it was the trusting helplessness in the face of the sleeping girl. The two cars sped closer to each other, and Robert Proctor could not change the direction of his car. The driver of the other car remained frozen at the wheel. At the last moment Robert Proctor sat motionless staring into the face of the onrushing, sleeping girl, his mother's cry still sounding in his ears. He heard no crash when the two cars collided head-on at a high rate of speed. He felt something push into his stomach, and the world began to go grey. Just before he lost consciousness he heard the scream stop, and he knew then that he had been hearing a single, short-lived scream that had only seemed to drag on and on. There came a painless wrench, and then darkness.

Robert Proctor seemed to be at the bottom of a deep black well. There was a spot of faint light in the far distance, and he could hear the rumble of a distant voice. He tried to pull himself toward the light and the sound, but the effort was too great. He lay still and gathered himself and tried again. The light grew brighter and the voice louder. He tried harder, again, and he drew closer. Then he opened his eyes full and looked at the man sitting in front of him.

"You all right, Son?" asked the man. He wore a blue uniform, and his round, beefy face was familiar.

Robert Proctor tentatively moved his head, and discovered he was seated in a reclining chair, unharmed, and able to move his arms and legs with no trouble. He looked around the room, and he remembered.

The man in the uniform saw the growing intelligence in his eyes and he said, "No harm done, Son. You just took the last part of your driver's test."

Robert Proctor focused his eyes on the man. Though he saw the man clearly, he seemed to see the faint face of the sleeping girl in front of him.

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The uniformed man continued to speak. "We put you through an accident under hypnosis—do it to everybody these days before they can get their driver's licenses. Makes better drivers of them, more careful drivers the rest of their lives. Remember it now? Coming in here and all?"

Robert Proctor nodded, thinking of the sleeping girl. She never would have awakened; she would have passed right from a sweet, temporary sleep into the dark heavy sleep of death, nothing in between. His mother would have been bad enough; after all, she was pretty old. The sleeping girl was downright waste.

The uniformed man was still speaking. "So you're all set now. You pay me the ten dollar fee, and sign this application, and we'll have your license in the mail in a day or two." He did not look up.

Robert Proctor placed a ten dollar bill on the table in front of him, glanced over the application and signed it. He looked up to find two white-uniformed men, standing one on each side of him, and he frowned in annoyance. He started to speak, but the uniformed man spoke first. "Sorry, Son. You failed. You're sick; you need treatment."

The two men lifted Robert Proctor to his feet, and he said, "Take your hands off me. What is this?"

The uniformed man said, "Nobody should want to drive a car after going through what you just went through. It should take months before you can even think of driving again, but you're ready right now. Killing people doesn't bother you. We don't let your kind run around loose in society any more. But don't you worry now, Son. They'll take good care of you, and they'll fix you up." He nodded to the two men, and they began to march Robert Proctor out.

At the door he spoke, and his voice was so urgent the two men paused. Robert Proctor said, "You can't really mean this. I'm still dreaming, aren't I? This is still part of the test, isn't it?"

The uniformed man said, *"How do any of us know?"* And they dragged Robert Proctor out the door, knees stiff, feet dragging, his rubber heels sliding along the two grooves worn into the floor.

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The suddenness with which we found ourself whirled from virtual obscurity to our present world-famous position, delightful though it otherwise was, has prevented us from finding out by press-time just who Joseph Dickinson is. Who he is, we mean, besides being the author of this fresh and funny story about a rocketry expert, an astro-ape named Beans, an externally voluptuous Ice Maiden with a Ph.D., a General whose name may well be Blimp, a singular note-in-a-bottle; and other matters connected with a Cape closely resembling Canaveral (where it would not surprise us one bit to learn that toddlers really do learn to count by repeating Five, Four, Three, Two, One, Oh, ——!).

THREE FOR THE STARS

by Joseph Dickinson

A WARM AND PLEASANT EVENING. A million stars blinked in the Florida sky (verified by the Chamber of Commerce). A million insects chirruped (denied by the Chamber).

Charles Crumpacker did not see the stars. The bar had huge windows for that specific purpose, and he avoided them. He did hear the insects, with pleasure. They reminded him of long ago nights, and a brass bed in the attic room of an old and solid white house. In the mild summer darkness there had been crickets, and the inquiring notes of a tiny owl which had nested in the eaves. Uncomplicated days, of basic pains and joys. One could weep, on a quiet night, for no reason other than quick, unidentified sorrow.

Now, Crumpacker considered, his life was no more complicated than the ten million parts of a space ship. And tomorrow, if each of the ten million bits of his life functioned perfectly in the split second allotted it, the ship would leave the ground. The positive performance of ten million more ifs and, several months and thirty-five million miles later, it would perhaps land upon the planet Mars.

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A hatch would open. An astro-ape named Beans, clad in a tiny space suit, would step out to scamper about for a quarter of an hour. Summoned, then, by a raucous bzzer in the helmet of his suit, Beans would re-enter the ship, clutching his little bucket of specimens. And so, several months later, a space capsule would float by parachute gently into the sea, to bob about until picked up by cutter or copter.

"If," muttered Charles Crumpacker. He repeated the word several times, and wondered why he had not followed his boyhood dreams of crime.

As it were, due to the Crumpacker method of re-entry thermal reduction, the Crumpacker theory of alternate propulsion, the Crumpacker-Barstow studies on high speed vibration, the—oh, theories and studies out the old gazoo—the United States hoped on the following day to eliminate the gap in the race for space. Alternate propulsion was only a theory (although tests had been impressive), hence the ape. Crumpacker was glad it was to be an ape. Yet he had become so fond of the affectionate little beast in the past year that he felt its death in the chill of space might yet leave him with the guilt of murder.

At the thought of Beans, Crumpacker grinned. If the press knew the real reason for that name . . .

The Press. Crumpacker sighed. They would swarm tomorrow. There was widespread interest in the project, for the knowledge was common that this was to be a shot to end shots. The date, in fact, was known. The destination of the rocket was believed to be the moon, however, and nothing had been done to dispel the rumor. Success or failure, the greater goal was bound to provide a better press.

Only months before, the Russians had sent two monkeys and a mouse to the moon. It had been intended that the moon be circled, and the animals return. But the ship had passed the moon and was now God knew where in space, its occupants lonesomely dead. The SPCA had been mad as hell.

Crumpacker had a sudden horrible vision of monkey skeletons, the ghostly crew of a wandering space ship. He forced his complete concentration on the cocktail napkin. The bar's name was there, in red, and he traced the letters with his finger. There were too many bars called the Satellite, or the Space Room, or Astro Room, even the Launching Pad. The name of this one was Pete's. Crumpacker was glad.

"Like the old maid's nipple," said Crumpacker. "It's not much, but it's sumpthin."

The bartender looked up quizically. "How's that?"

"My mother used to say that," said Crumpacker. "She was an old maid."

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"Yeah?" said the bartender uneasily.

"Yeah," said Crumpacker, and pushed his glass forward. "Fill 'er up."

As he raised his glass, Crumpacker watched his hand. It shook. The ice tinkled wildly against the glass. Tired, thought Crumpacker, and knew how true it was. From center to skin, he was tired. His right eye had developed an embarrassing twitch. He had the perpetual numb and nauseous ache of fatigue. He sipped bourbon now, and wished for cold pitchers of milk and the freshly ironed sheets of an attic bed.

The elbow in his side was persistent, and finally penetrated the numbness. "I ast if you're one of them scientists," said the owner of the elbow.

Crumpacker blinked away his weariness. The man was redfaced and wiry, his hands gnarled and knobby. Crumpacker nodded. "Thought I'd seen you out there," the man continued. "Ust to work out there myself. Diggin' holes and pourin' cement and stuff like that. Seen you come out one day and look over one of them skyrockets that never got off the ground. Blowed all t'hell."

Crumpacker, a little smashed, asked: "Ever sleep in an attic?" Then he said never mind to the hole digger's grunt.

"You one of them who's gonna shoot at the moon? When?"

"Tomorrow, maybe."

"Gonna shoot a man up there?"

Crumpacker shook his head, looked furtively about, whispered: "Keep a secret?" The cement pourer nodded eagerly. "Mice," hissed Crumpacker.

"Mice?"

"A million mice. They'll eat the moon so the Russians can't have it."

The man's eyes widened. "Eat the—." He caught on, momentarily considered anger, then chuckled. "Pretty good," he conceded. Then he sobered. "Course, you ain't gonna hit the moon."

God Almighty, thought Crumpacker. "Maybe not," he admitted.

"Can't hit it," said the man. Crumpacker shrugged. "Wanna know why?" Crumpacker made a noise. "I'll tell ya why." Another noise from Crumpacker. "The moon's a reflection of the sun, ain't it?"

"Yep," said Crumpacker.

"Well, you know what a reflection is, don't ya? You bein' a scientist and all."

"I have a general idea," said Crumpacker.

"It ain't nothin', that's what. A reflection ain't nothin'." He tapped Crumpacker's lapel, and spoke deliberately: "And how—can ya hit —nuthin'?" And he winked knowingly, secretively.

Crumpacker said: "But—." Thes he closed his mouth and gazed for the first time out of the

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window at the stars. There was an odd relief in such smug logic.

He sat until midnight and drank bourbon and thought of the world being flat and on the back of a turtle. As he was lurching out, the bartender extended a special invitation for Monday. There was to be a grand reopening under a new name: The Blast-Off. Crumpacker swore at him.

2.

The General, from a doorway ambush, took Crumpacker by surprise, as a good general should. "Do it today, eh, Crumpacker!" The General's voice was a machine gun staccato. "Give her hell today! Show Ivan, by God! Show him he doesn't own space! That's where we'll fight the next one, Crumpacker! Space, by God, there's the ticket! No room down here anymore. Not like the old days! I remember Anzio, by God—."

"I remember Babylon," said Crumpacker.

"Eh?"

"Never mind."

The General, muttering, turned in at a lavatory. No room, mused Crumpacker. No room for war. Never thought we'd run out of room for that.

Is that the Reason? Crumpacker wondered. Or is it to assure the reelection of the present administration? Or are we pioneers and space our last frontier? He laughed. Hell, I haven't even seen Niagara Falls. Or is it as a minister told me once—"for the greater glory of God"?

The Reason—must even the search for that be so complex? If I am ever asked, Crumpacker decided, I shall say that I, for one, am doing it just for the hell of it. He shook his head to dismiss his thoughts, was immediately sorry, and vowed to drink a better brand of bourbon.

In the final minutes of the countdown, Crumpacker's hangover had numbed into a faint giddiness. He was glad that things were going well. Although he grudgingly admitted that it probably wouldn't make a damn if things did foul up, with the sternly energetic Greta Barstow pottering about as though the telemetering receiving station were about to hatch.

Crumpacker winced into a metal folding chair. He narrowed his eyes, unblurred them on Greta Barstow. Remarkable woman. Strange woman. Neck up—uncosmeticed, tight haired, bespectacled scientist. Neck down—even a laboratory smock could not camouflage the voluptuous bust, circling in and down and around to a dandy bottom.

"Dandy bottom," mused Charles Crumpacker.

Greta Barstow turned to him her cold face of science. "I beg your pardon?"

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"Perfectly all right," said Crumpacker. "Ever sleep in an attic?"

"Dr. Crumpacker," said Greta, and her voice was crackling ice, "if you can emerge from your disgusting fog, I suggest—."

"Cert'ny," said Crumpacker.

What turns your gears, Dr. Barstow? Crumpacker wondered. What makes you go? Do you have a million parts like that damned steel cigar out there? Do you have printed circuits instead of veins? A telemeter for a heart? There's something obscene about that body, Barstow. Like breasts upon an IBM machine.

He had been associated with the Great Barstow for three years. Three years of that great brain clicking, those great breasts bouncing. Never a smile, never a flirtatious feminine word or glance. Their association had produced great things. Their theory on the cosmic radiation of the Van Allen belts, their studies on high speed vibration, thermal reentry, weightlessness . . . Yet sometimes—fleetingly—it occurred to Crumpacker that he would enjoy violating Dr. Greta Barstow in the back seat of a Model T on the edge of a moonswept golf course.

"Play golf?" asked Crumpacker, and was ignored.

He stooped to scowl at the subcarrier discriminator. It scowled back. How do you do it, you sunna bitch? How do you reach out and catch the heart beat of a monkey, catch it out of the air?

I know your guts, thought Crumpacker. I know the theory and the facts. Facts, God, facts. The fact is that you thrust out your ghostly little fingers and pluck a heart beat out of space. Facts, God, facts. We can build a brain and make it work. We know why it should work and how we want it to work, and it works. Why does it?

How do we know, he considered, that like the good Doctor F., we are not creating monsters? Suppose, instead of a heartbeat, we are radioed back the faintly remembered tom toms of a jungle tribe, a sound which has beaten in the pulse of generations of apes since once, long ago, an ancestor munched a bit of fruit and vaguely worried over the sounds made by a tribe not far removed from his.

Crumpacker smiled sadly, remembering his goodbye to Beans. The ape had clutched him affectionately about the legs. What must you think of us? the scientist wondered. We've subjected you to conditions, humiliations you were never scheduled for. You submitted humbly, and repaid us with love. You learned. You know what to do—you will, at least, react—when the hatch opens and you step out, a tiny, pathetic, unwondering creature on a dead planet. And all the time, your heart and lungs and liver, every

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throb and drip and sensation will spark through the power pack upon your back and leap into the ship back through nothing to us.

I wonder if you'll follow your heartbeat back, Beans, old boy? More likely you'll follow the Russian monks into eternal space. Then how long before by sheer averages you're pulled into the atmosphere of an unknown planet? Will some alien child wish on your glow as you flame into cinders and sprinkle down upon another world? Or will you plunge into the dust of a dead and airless moon, belching and breaking wind contentedly to the last? Hell, we'll probably push the boom button before you're a hundred feet off the ground and spread you all over the launch area. I like you, Beans. I'd hate to see you smeared.

But if—just if—you get into space, return or not—ah, Beans, what will you see? What will you feel? We've protected you against the things we know. Heat and cold and weightlessness and acceleration. You have a shield of hydrogen to protect you from the cosmic rays of the Van Allen belts. But what of the things we don't know? What belts and clouds and rays that our wildest imaginings can never reach—, dear God, we're the first cave man staring into the first fire, afraid of what it means, yet extending our fingers to its heat.

"I don't want to go," Crumpacker announced suddenly.

"Go where?" asked Greta Barstow.

"To Mars."

"Fortunately," sighed Barstow, "you're not. I doubt—."

"I want to stay here," Crumpacker continued. "I want to raise children and go to church and sit on porches and read books by Horatio Alger and drink beer."

Greta Barstow's eyes glittered. "I warn you, doctor, that I intend to complain about your drinking to General Moreland."

"I never drink to General Moreland," said Crumpacker haughtily. He turned back to the subcarrier discriminator. He shook his head, winced, and bent closer. "By God," he said happily. "It's busted."

Greta Barstow stepped quickly to his side. "What?"

"It's busted," Crumpacker repeated. "Not working. The whole thing's off for today. We can all go home and knit our spacesuits."

Greta examined the machine. She straightened, and sneered at Crumpacker. "Really, Crumpacker," she said. "This can be fixed in a matter of seconds."

"Rats," muttered Crumpacker. He brightened slightly. "Fix it with a hairpin, Barstow," he directed.

"Don't be absurd. The simple replacement of a dual triode regulator. An elementary—."

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Crumpacker took the front of Barstow's smock in his hand. "Goddamn you, Barstow," he said sadly. "Goddamn you and your dual triode regulator. You couldn't use a hairpin, could you?"

Greta Barstow pulled one way, Charles Crumpacker pulled the other, taking with him a sizeable chunk of smock as well as some undergarments. "No," he murmured.

Several technicians had leaped the moment cloth began to tear. When they seized Crumpacker, he was staring at the clothing he held in his hand, and still murmuring "No."

Greta Barstow was trying to cover her bosom with her hands. It was not difficult. "Not you, Barstow," said Crumpacker. "Not you." He began to weep softly. "Why, Barstow? Your damned symmetrical scientific mind? Here, gentlemen," he addressed the technicians, "souvenir nose cones."

"Give me those," snarled Greta Barstow.

They led Crumpacker away, and there was the sober silence that follows a scene. The General broke it. "All right, men," he said. "Let's get on with it. Let's do it for Charlie Crumpacker." He lowered his head. "Another martyr to the space war," he concluded impressively, and thought smugly that he had always known that Crumpacker was a nut.

The ten million parts functioned. They clicked and whirred where clicks and whirs were planned. They kissed and separated. Circuits were made and broken. Regulators regulated, relays relayed, cogs cogged. The steel cigar was lighted and with smoke and fire hoisted itself from its ash and Beans went away to Mars.

3.

Each day intensified the interest on Earth in the small ape floating through huge space. Poems were written about him. He inspired at least three books and countless short stories. There were seven songs written. One—"Monkey Talk on Mars"—was composed of unintelligible sounds and sold two million records.

There were few minds, in the weeks that followed, that did not sometime try to join the little ape in the black and sparkling space. And no ape ever before inspired so many people, individually and in congregation, to pray, as the Ruler of Space was deluged with pleas for the success of the project. Only small children and Crumpacker, in a rest home, prayed for the safe return of the ape.

Most important to science, but almost unnoticed by the public, were the countless reports documenting the functioning of the ape's body. Each beat of Bean's heart, each impulse of his brain,

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filtered back through space for analysis. Jacozzi, of the National Research Institute, sparked a major controversy by claiming to detect, after five weeks, a definite change in the pattern of Beans' brainwaves. The controversy was still raging when, at six weeks, all contact with the space ship was lost.

The American scientists, of course, maintained that even if the spaceship were lost, the achievement was an unparalleled success. The Russians extended their sincerest sympathies, but mild congratulation, maintaining that nothing had been learned, after all, that their two monkeys and a mouse had not provided months earlier. The American military flatly stated that we were now ahead of the Russians in everything. The Russians sneered and sent Gagarin to the moon. The SPCA was mad as hell, and introduced a bill into Congress which would prohibit the use of anything other than a human in future space experiments. That organization insisted, furthermore, that the destroy button be instantly pushed, so that somewhere in space Beans would be mercifully spared a long dying.

It was pointed out to these humanitarians that the explosive packet was no longer with the ship, that its intent had not been the mercykilling of a monkey, but to prevent an erratic rocket from plunging into Miami. Once the ship had escaped the earth, the packet had left it in the final stage. Anyway, said the scientists, everyone seemed in a big hurry to fail. The ship was entirely automatic, after all. There was no reason to believe that the ship would not perform its mission and return as planned, with Beans still fat and healthy.

So for six weeks more, the scientists remained at their receivers, hoping, but failing, to reestablish contact. And then, one day, the world watched the sky.

The capsule came floating down by parachute into the sea, scarcely a hundred miles from the calculated spot. Radar spotted it miles high, and the cutter practically reached out and caught it. The scientists were cursing happily, completely losing their aplomb. The General did some mental word rattling, and muttered: "Show Ivan, by God!" Ramirez, a technician, barked his knuckles as he undid Beans from his metal home. As many hands reached to open the hatch, one of the scientists murmured reverently: "It's been on Mars. My God, and came back here." The hatch was opened. The moment's silence seemed long.

A gaunt man named Donnelly chuckled uncertainly. "He—he looks a little the worse for wear."

Crumpacker was there, his reward for gentle madness, and he

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touched Donnelly's shoulder reassuringly. "He's been a long way, George."

The ape blinked up at them, squinting into the sun. His fur seemed sparcer, and splotched with white. His pinched monkey face was even thinner than before. "Beans," said Crumpacker softly. "How was it, boy?" The ape blinked rapidly a few times. Then his white teeth appeared, very slightly, in a grin. He clutched Crumpacker's hand. "Frightening," said the ape clearly. "Damned frightening." And his head lolled, senselessly.

"I don't believe it," murmured Donnelly.

The shocked silence continued after the ape had been lifted gently from the capsule and carried inside. Finally the General cleared his throat and laughed uneasily. "Damned beast sounded almost human. Guttural, of course. Just grunts and—."

"I heard him," said Ramirez. "He said—."

"Don't be a jackass!"

"His—his fur is almost white," muttered Ramirez, "and his eyes—."

"Shut up!" the General shouted. He looked at the stunned faces, changed his tone. "Men, men," he soothed. "Men, we're all overwrought. We've been under a terrible strain, working against terrible odds—."

"We're all martyrs to the goddamn space war," sighed Donnelly.

The General scowled, but let it pass, for the tension was broken. "Let's see what our ape—or whatever the hell it was—brought back," said Donnelly.

Ramirez lifted the receptacle gingerly from the capsule and placed it on the deck. The men crowded forward. Donnelly elbowed them back. "Easy, fellows," he said. "You'll all get a look."

"From another world," whispered one of the men. They gazed reverently into the container. There were mostly rocks, not unlike those on Earth, except for a strange rust-colored moss which covered several, and the bottom of the container was spread with a thin layer of purple dust. But in the middle, nestled in among the rocks, was a bottle. It was wide mouthed, eight or nine inches long, and of an almost transluscent glass, which seemed to vary from purple to blue, like glass that has been long in the desert sun. Inside the bottle was a small scroll.

The men, murmuring, moved back in awe. "Is—is it a joke?" breathed Crumpacker.

"Could—could it have been in the ship when we launched?" asked Donnelly. "Did any of you men . . . ?" He had only to look at their faces to know the answer. He touched the bottle lightly, drew back his hand.

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"Take it out," whispered Ramirez.

"Mars is a dead planet," said Crumpacker.

"Dead, hell!" said the General. "Take it out, Donnelly," he ordered. "Dead, hell! An ally!"

Donnelly took the bottle cautiously in his hand, gazed at it as it changed from purple to blue to purple in the sun. He tilted it, and the scroll dropped into his hand. "A dead planet," he said. He closed his eyes tightly, exhaled in a sobbing gasp. "My God," he said, his voice shaking. "Another civilization. What door are we about to open? What secrets are on the other side?"

"Open it," hissed Ramirez.

Slowly, slowly, Donnelly placed the bottle upon the deck. With quivering hands, he began to unroll the scroll.

"Easy, for God's sake!" cried the General.

They stared, fascinated, as Donnelly spread it between his hands. The writing on the scroll was in blue, a delicate script.

"We've communicated, by God!" shouted the General exultantly. "Wait'll Ivan hears about this, by God! If we can only decode it!"

"It—it's in Spanish," said Ramirez hesitantly.

The General snorted. "Don't be a jackass!"

"I can read it," Ramirez insisted. 'It's funny Spanish, but that's what it is."

"Ramirez," said Crumpacker eagerly, "read it. What does it say?"

Ramirez squinted uncertainly at the scroll. "Well," he said uneasily.

"Hah!" said the General. "Just as I—."

Ramirez tightened his jaw. "It says—by God, it says: 'No cream today. Leave three quarts milk, and a kiss for me.'" He giggled hysterically. "It's signed 'Mary'!"

The kneeling men were silent, watching the paper as a breeze fluttered it in Donnelly's hand. At last Crumpacker began to chuckle, very softly. Oblivious to the watching men, he rose to his feet and blew a kiss at the sky.

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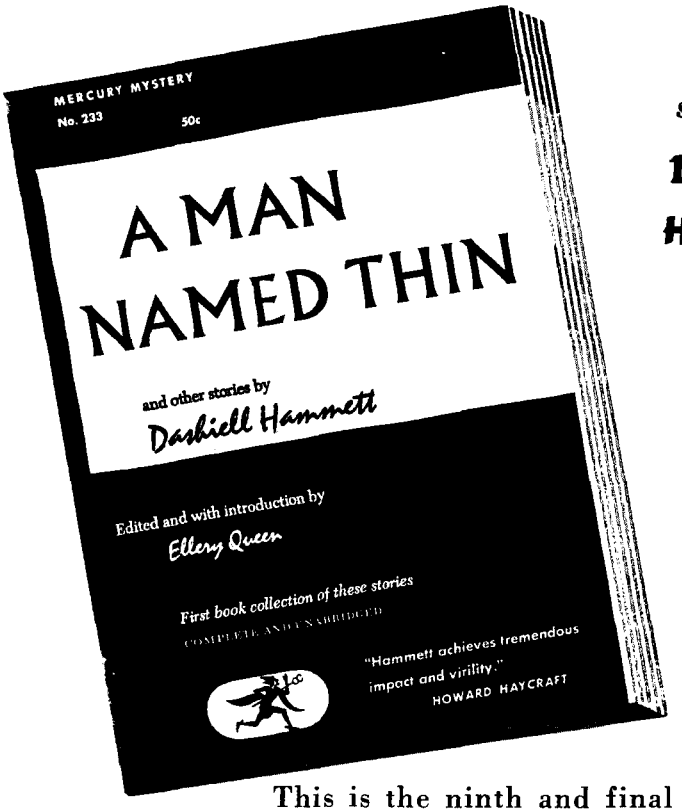

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